

Against my Friends

Story: Against my Friends

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Author: Yoru No Grim

Authorlink: <https://www.fanfiction.net/u/490421/>

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Summary: AU: Four youngsters, convinced of the truth of Kraden's latest work, work to unseal alchemy. But two opposing forces are determined to stop them for different reasons... Chapter 22. Dang but it's been a long time, no?

***Chapter 1*: Beginnings Part 1**

8BTFreek: My first fic to be loaded!

Red Mage: Okay, what is it? And why should they read it? I mean, "My first fic to be loaded" isn't exactly high caliber material, is it? It lacks pizzazz! It's so...boring!

8BTFreek: *Raising Sol Blade* You were saying?

Red Mage: Erm...it's good! *Thinking* Hey, wait a minute! You always hit yourself with those weapons!

8BTFreek: Only in reviews. You may not have noticed, RM, but this isn't a review!

Black Mage: Kill him, kill him, kill him...

8BTFreek: No, BM. I need him for the special effects! I'm not killing him! *Stashes Sol Blade* Now then, on with the fic! It's a bit AU, and I may have borrowed some ideas, but if I borrow an idea, I'll always give credit! Oh, and...*checks notepad* this has Valeshipping, Steamshipping, and Windshipping, so... any flames will be met with this! *Pulls out IGNORE cannon* Yeah, the IGNORE cannon! Gotta love it! And now, the story!

****Chapter 1: Beginnings, Part 1****

(In Lalivero) "No, I won't! You can't make me!" Isaac ran out into the street. "You aren't sending me to Shaman! I won't go!"

"Isaac, listen to us." Dora, the well-known healer, came out of the vine-covered house. "We're sending you to Shaman because you need to go there. I mean, you do want to find

the one person you're spending the rest of your life with, don't you?"

"Yeah, I do, but I want to find her on my own, not have my parents find her for me!" Isaac stormed off down the street, bumping into Faran's daughter. "Sorry, Jenna."

"No problem, Isaac. Say, what was that? And why is your dad shouting gibberish?" Isaac turned around. Sure enough, his dad was in the doorway. He was staring at Isaac, and was muttering. This won't be pleasant, Isaac thought. A giant sword burst from nowhere. And it was heading straight for Jenna. He was aiming for me. I guess his aim is getting worse with age. Isaac jumped for Jenna, knocking her out of the way of the spell. His father aimed again. "Ragnarok!" screamed the old man. "Isaac, come back here! If you don't, I'll attack you again!"

Isaac ran out of the city. Jenna followed him, breathing heavily. "Isaac, why did you run from your dad? I mean, isn't he supposed to help you?"

"Yeah, until he decided to send me away to Shaman Village to get me married to some Venus Adept." Isaac turned around after they had exited the city. "Flint, set." A small brown creature appeared near his foot.

"Isaac, why did you run away?" the little creature asked. "And why did you run with a Mars Adept? You know what your parents would say!"

A Mars Adept? Jenna looked at Isaac. "What is that thing? And what did it mean by Mars Adept?"

"I'll explain later. Let's just get out of here." The two of them ran off down the road, away from Lalivero. I hope I never have to go there again, thought Isaac.

(In Imil) "Mia, it's for our own good. You know that the purity of the Mercury Clan must be maintained, even if we have to marry each other to ensure that purity!" Alex paced the length of the sanctum. "It's the purity of the Mercury Clan that has kept so many from lighting the lighthouse. Taint the clan's purity, and you risk letting the lighthouse get lit!"

"Alex, you aren't making sense." Mia turned and looked at him. "Just because you don't approve of my decision doesn't mean-"

"Mia, you didn't make a decision. You acted in haste. You messed up. These things happen. Saying you won't marry me is just a little thing that you can't figure out."

"Well, if you want to marry me, you'll have to make me love you!" Mia stormed out of the sanctum. "Goodbye, Alex, and good riddance!" Hail waddled out after her.

"The guardian spirit would choose to follow the one who would wreck the clan? Today just isn't my day. I need to find her." He gathered some of his supplies. "Let's see, herbs, potions, amulets, staff, gloves. That should be all of it." He walked out. The sun was low in the sky now, and Mia was probably far away.

(Outside of Tolbi) Gareth stood on a rock. Hama had sent him on this quest three years ago, and he had still not found Ivan. "I don't know what to do, Sheba. I mean, it's fine that we haven't been everywhere, but I'm beginning to lose hope. After all, it's been fifteen years. Ivan is probably still in Vale, but we don't know where that is."

Sheba looked at him. "I thought you said you knew where it was. I mean, you spent two years of your life there." Gareth frowned at her. "Memories don't lie, and neither do

thoughts." A glow surrounded her. "What right did I have? I had every right. I mean, if I'm going to go on a quest with you, I need to know some things about you!"

"Yeah, but you don't need to use Mind Read. You could just ask." Gareth turned toward the city. It was really a calming sight. "Just don't Mind Read me again. It's not very kind of you to do that." Her silence was unexpected. He turned around to see two armed guards. And they had Sheba tied up. Gareth stood to face them. "Mars!" he shouted. The image of a Mars Djinni sped down from above, striking the two guards but missing Sheba. Forge sat on his shoulder, looking exhausted.

"What was that for?" Gareth pointed in front of the djinni. The djinni looked at Sheba and the two singing guards and said, "Oh."

"Well, let's get rolling." Gareth walked into the city, Sheba by his side, acting like the younger sister he'd never had.

8BTFreek: So, what did you think?

Fighter: No swords! What happened to swords?

Black Mage: Well, dumbo, maybe we can find out next chapter!

Fighter: Oh. Okay. Whatever you say, BM! I'll always believe you, buddy!

Black Mage: Urge to destroy Fighter rising...

8BTFreek: Stop that. I was talking to the readers. Now then, R&R please!

Red Mage: Story was good, I think. Even though the Respond request was tacky...

8BTFreek: *Pulling out Sol Blade again* You were saying, RM?

Red Mage: *Gulps* Erm... Sounds fine to me! Respond, people!

White Mage: 8BTFreek! How dare you threaten Red Mage?!

8BTFreek: And yet you never defend Black Mage... it doesn't matter. I'll update soon, I promise! And if I don't... let's not go there, shall we?

***Chapter 2*: Beginnings, Part 2**

Red Mage: I told you! Your review request was so pathetic that nobody reviewed!

8BTFreek: Shut up, RM. People haven't reviewed because I'm only just beginning.

White Mage: Now be nice, 8BTFreek. Red Mage has feelings too.

8BTFreek: Yeah, right.

White Mage: Apologize. You too, Red Mage.

8BTFreek: Fine. Sorry. Say, Red Mage, let me ask you something.

Red Mage: What?

8BTFreek: If you could replace one fellow muse, who would it be?

White Mage: You can't replace a muse!

Everyone else: Yeah, right!

Mario: Pick me, pick me!

Gannon: No, me!

Blackbelt: Huh? What's going on? Ooh, pizza! *Starts munching pizza*

Fighter: I like swords.

Everyone else: Shut up!

Red Mage: Erm... Fighter!

Fighter disappears Fighter: Woohoo!

8BTFreek: And now, the new muse...Alex!

Alex: What? What just happened? First I'm on top of Mount Aleph, now I'm here... what have you done?!

8BTFreek: You are now my muse! HAHAHA! I had to get rid of one.

Alex: Why? Couldn't you have just gotten me and kept one?

8BTFreek: I'm a Greek Myth freak. There were 9 muses in Greek Myths. There are 9 muses in my writing.

Alex: Whatever. *Goes off with Gannon and Mario* We're going to leave you alone with the freak show here.

8BTFreek: Whatever. Anyway, I forgot the disclaimer last chapter, so here it is. *Takes a deep breath* *In the same style of "you were right and we were wrong"* "I do not own Golden Sun." *rolls eyes* There. Now, on to the fic!

****Chapter 2: Beginnings, part 2**** (In Vale) The twin gates creaked open, admitting only three people. Ivan dropped his short sword and took a closer look at them. Two were obviously high-ranking military officials from Prox, and the third was a very bewildered man with gloves on his hands. A golden amulet hung from the young man's neck. Ivan walked up to him. "Hello. Welcome to Vale. Who are you?"

The young man said nothing. He merely looked at Ivan's hands. He began muttering. Ivan could only catch some

phrases, but it sounded like he was saying something like "Can it be? Is there really a village of Adepts?"

"Well?" The young man said nothing. Slowly, he took off his hood and gloves. Long blue hair fell down, and symbols were burned on the back of his hand. "Ah, the time-cursed marks of an Adept." Ivan leaned over and inspected the markings. "Let's see... a Mercury Clansman, of family..." Ivan looked at the right hand. "Family Hail. Am I correct?" The young man nodded dumbly.

"Yes, indeed. That is my name. I am Alex Hail, and I am looking for a young woman. Have you by any chance encountered a Mercury Adept recently?"

"No, I am afraid not, o Alex of the Mercury Clan. Why do you ask?"

"She has run away." Alex said the last few words with a hint of despair. "She... she said that she didn't love me. But that doesn't matter. I must find her. Farewell, young Jupiter Adept." Alex walked toward the gate, but Ivan stopped him.

"You look like you've been traveling for days. Take a rest at the inn." Ivan led Alex to the inn, which was just a few steps away. He then went to the other two. {I wonder what they want,} he thought to himself.

Before he could speak, the larger of the two said, "My name is Generalissimo Agatio Fury. This is Kommandant Karst. You will take us to the Mayor. We have important business to discuss with him." The large man stepped forward, grabbing Ivan's arm.

"Agatio, are you going to behave like a phoenix caught in a beehive? It does no good to order children around." Her accent was thicker, and she had long red hair. "I say we ask

this young man if he will take us to the Mayor." She turned to Ivan. "So, what do you say?"

"Fine. I'll take you to see Grandfather." Ivan walked off. The two Proxans followed him.

"Well, if you will not listen to us, maybe you will listen to what Kraden has to say on this issue." The Generalissimo and the Kommandant had been in the room for a long time. Ivan was eavesdropping, something generally frowned upon in Vale, but it was the only way he would hear the conversation. Fifteen-year-olds were generally not permitted in the meeting room. "Would you like to hear?"

"Fine, but it won't change our views." That was Grandfather. Grandmother often said that he was the most steadfast person she had ever met. Ivan thought he was a bit too stubborn to listen to sound advice.

The Kommandant's voice flew through the little keyhole. "According to the scholar Kraden, Weyard is like a bear, and Alchemy is like sunlight. While the bear is in the sun, it can eat and drink, and maintain its health. Without the sun, the bear sleeps, and he replenishes some energy. But if the bear sleeps too long, it becomes weak, and starves. Kraden believes that this is where we are going. If Alchemy is not released..." Ivan saw what she was saying. He sat back a little.

"This is mere speculation, brought on by experimental fumes and a bit too much thinking." Ivan couldn't believe what he was hearing. His grandfather was rejecting the learned opinion of the wisest sage in Tolbi, not to mention the world. Ivan decided then what he had to do. He grabbed the Move Tablet from the table, running out the door.

After dodging the guards at the Mount Aleph gate, he raced into Sol Sanctum. The puzzles were relatively simple for his intellect. However, when he found that the Sol room had changed, he was puzzled. He examined the spot of light on the wall, then jumped back as it expanded to form a portal. He went through into an amazing room. There were four statues, one in each corner. Each one was holding a different gem. {What are these statues? And what are the gems they're holding?} Curious, Ivan ran across to the statue with the purple gem. As he approached, he felt a strange affinity with the gem. He picked it up and put it in his pocket. He ran to the other statues. He didn't feel the same, but, being the inquisitive young man he was, he grabbed the other three. As he put the last gem in his pocket, two figures approached him.

"Good, young boy. Now then, give us the Stars." The voice had a thick Proxan accent, and it was definitely female. Ivan turned around, only to see the face of Kommandant Karst, a twisted smile on her face. Her eyes gleamed dangerously. Behind her stood the Generalissimo, wearing a different expression, somewhere between a snarl and a grin. "Either that, or I loose my companion on you."

"Never!" Ivan launched a whirlwind spell at them, then ran out the strange golden gate that had appeared in the middle of the room. The room was breaking up behind him, but he didn't care. As he ran through the portal, he could hear the shouts of the two soldiers. He ran off just as the room behind him erupted.

The soldiers were now running after him. "Get him! Don't let him get away! Don't just stand there!" Agatio's furious voice echoed through the chamber.

{They must be running faster than the lava,} thought Ivan. {It's remarkable that they can run faster than me. Faster than the lava!} He turned around. The scene behind him could have been dragged from a horror novel. The two Proxans weren't running ahead of the lava: they were riding it. Ivan cast a Ray spell at them, but it didn't have any effect. "Plasma!" he yelled. The bolts of thunder from the spell hit the soldiers right between the eyes. Ivan ran out of the sanctum, knocking over the guards. He pulled out the purple gem from his pocket, then looked at it, still running toward the gate. {So this is the legendary Jupiter Star. If what I heard is true, then these are the other Elemental Stars. Maybe I can use them to light the lighthouses and release Alchemy again. Weyard needs it, according to Kraden. Yes, that's what I'll do.} He ran past the young man in the plaza and burst through the gates.

Alex stared at the young man, as well as the gem he was holding. {Why is he holding the Jupiter Star? And what is he mumbling?} Alex looked up. Mount Aleph had blown its peak. "Mount Aleph is exploding! Everybody out of the city!" Alex raced to the gate, closely following the young man. {I think that was the guy who offered me a room at the inn. What would he want with the Stars?}

8BTFreek: Well, what do you think?

Red Mage: I wish you hadn't let Alex in.

8BTFreek: Too bad.

Alex: Who's talking behind my back? *Prepares to cast the water-shooting Psynergy he used at the beginning of TLA* Is

it you, Freek?

8BTFreek: And if I am? *Raises Sol Blade*

Alex: Good point. *Walks off again* I'm going to see Mario. He says he's got some really neat vids of...

White Mage: We don't want to know, Alex.

8BTFreek: Right.

Alex: Fine. Say, what's with the {} things?

8BTFreek: Thought bubbles.

Alex: Oh. Well, I'm going to Mario's. See ya. *Walks out*

8BTFreek: *Stashes Sol Blade* Okay. That's enough writing for now. Please review, if not for my sake, then for the story's. Don't ask me why I said that.

***Chapter 3*: The Way It Must Be**

8BTFreek: See? I told you they would review!

REVIEW RESPONSES:

Helga v Dijk: Yeah, Ivan rules, doesn't he? As for the Alex thing, well, that's just the way it goes! Thanks for reviewing!!!

~ END REVIEW RESPONSES~

Red Mage: Yeah, but it's just one review. One review doesn't make you a good author!

White Mage: Apologize to 8BTFreek, Red Mage!

Red Mage: *sticks out tongue* And if I don't?

White Mage: *Smashes RM's face in with her big-ass hammer* Well?

Red Mage: Ow... Okay. I'm sorry, Freek.

8BTFreek: Don't mention it. Let's just get going with the story.

Gannon: But first, since you knuckleheads will forget it, here's the disclaimer: 8BTFreek does not own the actual games "Golden Sun" and "Golden Sun: The Lost Age." If he did, the first would be so crappy that Nintendo wouldn't let Camelot make the second. Oh yes, and if he says differently, I'll spear him with my trident.

8BTFreek: Right... *Cowering in fear* Let's just continue with the story, okay?

****Chapter 3: The Way It Must Be****

(In Vault)

Mia was lost and confused. {It's so different here...} She wandered down another side street, still looking for an Inn. {And that day the sky turned red... That was frightening! Why did that happen?} She was so distracted that she didn't notice the young man that hit her head-on. She bent down to examine him. He had short blonde hair, oddly colored robes, and strange markings on the back of his hand. Mia pulled him up, then saw the crowd chasing him. She dragged him off into an alleyway, then shook him gently.

"What? Who are you?" the young man asked. "Why are you here? And why are they chasing me?" He got up slowly, brushing dirt off of his clothes. After standing there for a few moments glowing, he said, "Ah. Your name is Mia, you are a Mercury Adept, and you are obviously amazed that I would walk through a city without gloves on my hands." He looked at her sharply. "That is right, is it not?"

"Uh, yeah, it is. How do you know that?"

"Well, being a Jupiter Adept has its advantages. Like mind-reading, for one." At her amazed look, he said, "Geez, it's just something I can do! It's just natural for me, like your Psynergy is to you."

"Uh, okay. Listen, we really need to get you some gloves. That way, nobody will be able to find out you're an Adept." She dragged him into a store and walked up to the man behind the counter. "Excuse me, sir. My young friend here needs some gloves."

"Sure thing, madam. It'll be ten coins for some decent gloves. And would you like a robe to go with them, sir?"

Ivan looked at his robes. If he was going to be unrecognizable, he'd need new robes as well. "Yes. Erm, could you make the gloves black? And maybe some gray robes?"

"Ah, the look of a storm. Certainly." The man got some robes and the black gloves. "Anything else?"

Mia shook her head. "That will be all, thank you." She paid him, then went off to an inn. "I'll see you later, okay?"

"Um, Mia, there's something I should tell you. Do you by any chance know a guy named Alex?"

Mia cursed under her breath. "Yes, I know a man by that name. Why?"

Ivan ignored her question. "Does he have blue hair? And is he, by any chance, a member of the Mercury Clan?"

Mia cursed again. "That bastard! He follows me out of Imil, then... aargh! I can't escape him! How do you know him?"

"I met him back in Vale. He's looking for someone matching your description. He sounded depressed. He also said you ran away, but you look old enough to get out on your own." Ivan smiled. "Is it love?"

Mia laughed. "Maybe for him, but not for me." She sighed. "Honestly, if he found out I was traveling with you..."

"I'd be livid." The sound made them both turn around. Mia had the rod that Alex had given her drawn. Ivan drew his

sword. "Mia, why did you run away? I needed you, and you left me alone! Is that anyway to behave to your lover?"

"No," said Mia, "and if I ever find him, I won't do that to him unless I have to." Alex wore a scowl. {Serves him right, chasing me halfway around Angara just so he can try to marry me. Why can't he leave me alone?}

Ivan moved forward. "It sounds like a case of love and hate. Alex has the love, Mia has the hate. So, pretty boy, what do you want?" Alex attempted to mimic the snarl Karst wore when he stole the Stars, but it was obviously not working, because Alex just laughed.

He turned on Ivan. "Pretty boy? And I suppose you consider yourself manly, running around in a green cape. How pathetic. Anyway, Mia and I need to get back to Imil. We need to get married so we can properly protect the lighthouse from anyone who'd try to light it." He looked pointedly at Ivan. He made to grab Mia's arm, but Mia was faster than him. She ran around and hit him at the base of his neck.

"Let's get a room at the inn, quick!" The two ran off.

(At the Inn)

"So you're going to try and light the lighthouses? Maybe we should start with Venus lighthouse. Alex will be waiting for me in Imil if he doesn't take me there himself, so we can't go there first. But in Lalivero, there's nobody to stop us."

Ivan grabbed a piece of chicken off the plate. "Yoh, daff a gud idah." He swallowed. Mia looked at him, a bewildered look on her face. "I said, yeah, that's a good idea. I think we should start tomorrow."

"Fine. Ivan, let me ask you something."

He dropped the chicken leg. "What is it, Mia? What do you want to know?" But Ivan was thinking. {There's only one question she would ask.}

"How did you get the Elemental Stars in the first place?"

{Bingo. The one question on everyone's minds. The one question that everyone wants the answer to, and you just asked it.} "Well, it's a long story. I was in Vale, minding my own business, when..." He continued for a few hours, explaining things that needed to be explained. Occasionally, Mia would ask a question, like "Why weren't you permitted to climb Mount Aleph?" or "And you didn't get lost or anything?"

After he concluded, she had one last question. "The Move Tablet. What happened to it?"

"As far as I know, it's deep in Mount Aleph somewhere. Now, let's just go to our rooms. Good night, Mia." He ran up the stairs, collapsed on his bed, and fell asleep. The next morning, he awoke to a knock on the door. Quickly, he tossed on the gray robes he had bought the day before, pulled on the black gloves, and hurried out the door. Mia was waiting there.

"Hurry up. If you don't hurry, we won't make it before Alex finds us!"

(In Tolbi)

Felix looked at the two guards. Something had gone wrong. They kept talking about a tall boy with flaming red hair and fiery eyes, a boy who could launch fire from his fingertips. "Enough. I will look through the city. If I find this boy, I'll

bring him in for questioning. If I don't, expect a punishment." He walked out the door. A few streets down, he saw a tall young man with bright red hair. "Hello, sir. I'm looking for someone who burned two of my best soldiers, then ran away. Do you know this young man?"

"Look, those soldiers were molesting my best friend. If you can't respect that, then fine. I'm not about to let two guards get away with terrorizing a young girl. Got it?" The boy turned around. Fury was etched into his face, and his eyes had a fiery, fanatical glow.

"You also harmed two soldiers of Lord Babi. If I had my way, you'd be chained up in the dungeons of Babi's palace. As it is, you get to fight me instead." Felix bowed. "I am Felix, captain of the guard of Tolbi. And you are?"

The young man bowed. "Garet Forge, of the southern Mars Clan." But before they could exchange blows, a girl ran up to them.

"Garet, if you've gotten yourself into a duel again... What would Hama say?" The girl was about fifteen, by Felix's reckoning. Then again, he once mistook the Sage Kraden to be about fifty, so his reckoning was sometimes off. She noticed him. "My name is Sheba. And you?"

"The name is Felix. Are you the one he was talking about?" Felix took a closer look. She had blonde hair, was fairly short, and had strange violet eyes.

"Garet told you about me? Let me guess, it was the incident outside the city with those two buffoons that tried to kidnap me, wasn't it?"

"Hm, this is going to be difficult to explain. I know. I'll take you to my place and we can talk it over there." They went off

to the large palace near the north of the city. "This is Lord Babi's palace. He lets me stay here. We'll talk about this 'incident' over dinner, okay?" He opened the door and led them inside.

8BTFreek: Well?

Red Mage: The ending was...strange. And you were obviously trying to write. It just sucked that horribly.

8BTFreek: *Raises Seven (a sword from FF Legend 2)* Want to try that again?

White Mage: Red Mage, don't say things like that. And 8BTFreek, don't threaten Red Mage every time he makes a negative comment.

8BTFreek: White Mage, listen. Red Mage insults me, he doesn't just make negative comments. The only way to get through to him is to threaten him.

White Mage: That doesn't matter. *Pulls out her hammer* Apologize now!

Red Mage: I am sorry, o great creator and employer! Please, forgive me, and do not let her loose on me!

8BTFreek: Apology accepted. Don't worry, I'll lock her in a dark room with Black Mage. That should help. *Tosses Black Mage and White Mage in a closet and locks the door*

Gannon: Since Freek and the freak show are wasting your time, I'd better close the chapter. Review now.

8BTFreek: Yes, please review. That, or I hurt Red Mage.

Red Mage: Eep! Please review!

***Chapter 4*: The Meeting**

8BTFreek: Hm, maybe more people would review if I turned off the "No Anonymous Reviewers" switch. *Flips switch*

Red Mage: No, they won't, and I'll tell you why. The story sucks.

8BTFreek: Shut up, or I'll toss you in that closet with BM.

Red Mage: Let's just respond to the reviews you got!
Cowers in fear

REVIEW RESPONSES: EchoKazul: It's that good? Thanks! As for the Isaac thing, I know, I know. It's time for me to put him back in. He's coming in this chapter. Can't say much more without ruining the plot forever, though.

Mesoforte: Thanks! I kinda guessed you were a Mudshipper, but I'm glad you still like the story. Anyway, most of the romance doesn't get going for quite a while. END
RESPONSES

Red Mage: Pathetic responses.

8BTFreek: *Ignores RM* Let's see how they're doing. I left them in there a long time. *Opens closet*

Black Mage: I thought she had a White Mage's Oath...
Collapses

White Mage: Damn White Mage's Oath! *Heals BM* Please don't make me do that again!

8BTFreek: Fine. Say, where are the others?

(In another room)

Gannon: Way back when I was just a little bitty boy...

Mario: Alex, listen carefully. Gannon's got this song memorized, but the lyrics are a little hard to get.

Alex: And we're doing this because?

Mario: Then we can annoy that fancy Red Mage! He's got this high-and-mighty attitude. But he's never learned this song. It bugs the hell out of him to hear it!

Alex: Good point.

(Main Room)

8BTFreek: Okay, that takes care of that. On to the story.

Evil Princess Sara: Yes, but don't forget. You don't own Golden Sun, just this stupid Fic.

Red Mage: Yes.

****Chapter 4: The Meeting****

(Outside Kalay)

"Mia, I've looked over the map. Kalay is definitely west." Ivan took another look at the map, then at their surroundings. {We can't be lost. It defies all logic.}

"Look, this is the third time we've passed this rock. We're lost. Turning left at every fork in the road wasn't a good idea!" She sat down in the middle of the path.

"I didn't turn left at every fork! I went right at the last one!"

"Looking for Kalay, are you?" Ivan looked up. Sitting on a rock were two people. One was a tall blonde man with a yellow-striped scarf. He carried a nasty looking sword, and wore worn leather gloves. Sitting next to him was a young woman with long red hair, a dirtied dress that was obviously once finely woven, and a short staff with a blue orb on the end. The man got up off the rock. "You're heading the right way. Just head about half a mile east, and you've got it."

A small creature popped out at his feet. "I've never seen a Jupiter Adept wear dark colors. What's the occasion, young one?"

"Flint, Standby. If I want you to talk, I'll let you know." The creature disappeared. "So, you two are Adepts. Well, I guess it's safe to let our secret out." He took off the gloves he was wearing. Burned on the backs of his hands were strange symbols. Ivan took a closer look.

"You are of Family Flint of the Venus Clan, yes? I feel I can trust you. My name is Ivan, and this is Mia. Tell me, what was that creature?"

Mia walked up to them. "That's a djinni, Ivan. The djinn are the clan guardians. Every family has one. So, now you know our names, but we don't know yours. Would you mind telling us?"

The girl jumped down. "My name's Jenna, and this is Isaac. We've just come from Kalay. Seems they got some news from Lalivero."

Isaac laughed. "Yeah, it seems that a strange blonde man living with the healers kidnapped Faran's daughter, a beautiful red-haired girl, and ran out of the city. He didn't look like he wanted to return. And he doesn't. In fact, if the Merchants knew what he'd gone through..." The smile faded

from his face. "They would have sent me to Shaman if I hadn't left. And I didn't kidnap Jenna. She came because she wanted to. Anyone who says differently is lying. But does anyone listen? No, nobody gives a damn about our lives. They just see a blonde man and a red-haired girl, and they assume the rumors are true. Charon damn them to the dark kingdom, all of them!" Isaac was enraged. Jenna put a hand on his shoulder, and he calmed down.

"You'll have to excuse him. It's been a stressful journey. Now then, why are you here? And are you traveling together?" She looked at Mia, then Ivan. "After all, Jupiter Adepts don't usually choose Mercury Adepts for traveling companions, or so Isaac tells me. Not without other kinds of Adepts, at least." She looked at Isaac. "That is right, isn't it?"

Isaac nodded, then turned to Ivan and said, "You'll have to excuse her. She just found out that she's a Mars Adept, and she's been asking all sorts of questions. But she is right. I heard from my parents that it's rare to see different types of Adepts traveling with one another unless there's one of each. So what's going on?"

Ivan looked Isaac in the eye. "Well, master Flint, we're on a rather important quest. We're trying to light the elemental lighthouses."

"Ah, trying to return Alchemy? Inspired by Kraden's latest teaching, were you?" At their incredulous stares, he said, "Sheesh! Just because Lalivero's in the middle of nowhere and under the thumb of that Tolbian bastard Babi, you think we're all backwards hicks that don't know anything new?"

"Isaac, we didn't mean any offense. Honest." Mia and Jenna exchanged significant looks. Somehow, it just seemed that

Isaac wasn't normally like this. "Ivna and I were just amazed that the Sage's knowledge had traveled so far."

"It's been out for over a year now. That has to count for something. Anyway, you might want to stay away from Kalay for a while. They're still getting over the loss of this 'big criminal', and they might not be so welcoming to strangers." Isaac laughed again. "Then again, we could join you. It would be nice to see the world, and lighting the beacons is the perfect way to prove to my parents that I'm old enough to make my own decisions. So, what do you say?"

Ivan nodded dumbly. "So, if you're joining us, maybe we shouldn't head towards Lalivero. How about Imil?"

Mia tapped Ivan on the shoulder. "Uh, Ivan? You've forgotten. Alex is probably waiting for me there! He'll try to get me married as soon as possible!"

"Still," said Isaac, "it would be better than if we went back to Lalivero. They probably wouldn't let Jenna leave the city again!"

"Yeah, Dad would keep me locked in the house. But if we went to Imil, things would have time to settle. Mia, listen. It just makes more sense to go to Imil right now. I feel sorry for your situation, but there's nothing to do but face it with the kind of courage you must have to go running off with Ivan. Just face your fear." Jenna grabbed Mia's hand. "For our sake, please. We'll help you avoid Alex. I promise."

"Fine. Let's just get out of here. They'll probably be looking for you." With that, the four set off through the woods, heading northward, in the direction of Imil and Mercury Lighthouse.

(In Babi's Palace)

"And that, sir, is why we're here in Tolbi." Gareth leaned back over his plate, shoveling down the rest of his food.

"Fine. But tell me, where are you from? Is it Prox, by any chance?"

Garet froze. He remembered the day, 15 years ago, that had changed his life forever.

(15 years ago...)

The weird blue-haired man was still standing over his dad's body. The blonde woman had already murdered his mother. They were torturing his father. "Tell me how to enter the inner sanctum, old man!" The blue haired man lit a fire behind his father's neck. The two-year old cringed.

"You'll...never...know..." His father collapsed.

The blonde woman began shouting. "Saturos, you idiot! What will Puelle say, when he learns that you killed a man for information?"

The blue-haired man shrugged. "Menardi, who says Puelle needs to know? Besides, didn't you kill the woman?" He gestured to Gareth's mother. "These are casualties of war. Now then, let's burn down this house. Burn the evidence."

Garet raced out the front. The others exited out the back. Behind him, he could hear a fierce battle. A lightning bolt hit the ground in front of him. He made his way to the plaza. There, he met a young girl. She was six, and she was yelling "Ivan! Ivan!" when she saw him. "Well, hello! Who are you?" Gareth shook his head. "Don't worry. I won't hurt you. Now then, who are you?"

"Gewwa. De bad bads hurt by bobby ad daddy!" He began crying.

"Don't cry, little guy. I'll help you. My name's Hama, and I'm looking for a little guy. His name's Ivan. You haven't seen him, have you?" Gareth shook his head. Just then, a loud cry came up from near Mount Aleph. "Soldiers! Come on, we've gotta get going!" She dragged him.

Two words rushed through Gareth's mind. {Saturos. Menardi.}

(In Babi's Palace)

"Garet, let him go! Maybe he can help!" Gareth had tossed away his food, and his sword was pointing at Felix's throat. "Garet, listen! He doesn't know! Let him go!" Sheba kicked Gareth.

"Ow!" Gareth turned around. The same cold fury was in his eyes. "Damn it! Wait..." A smile touched his lips as he saw Sheba. "Menardi. Long time, no see. Remember me? I was that little kid in the house you burned down." He roared, then struck. Sheba raised her rod in protection.

"Garet, it's me! Sheba! Your best friend!" He shuddered. His eyes changed back to normal.

"Right. Well, Gareth, why do you have this hatred for Prox?"

His muscles twitched. "Those murdering bastards. They murdered my mother, tortured my father to death... they will pay."

Felix turned to Sheba. "Well, if you can keep him under control, I might consider joining you on your quest."

Sheba looked at him. "It's not usually this bad. I think his rage is finally taking control of him. It's all he's got left, since Hama couldn't come with."

Felix nodded. "Fine then. I'll join."

8BTFreek: Hahaha!

Red Mage: What? Why are you laughing?

8BTFreek: I'm done, and my fingers are frozen!

Red Mage: And that's good because...

8BTFreek: Shut up, RM.

Alex: Hey, you've got weasels on your face.

Red Mage: AARGH! THE SONG! THE EARS! IT BURNS!

8BTFreek: That's when I knew it was time to end the chapter.

Alex: Yeah. Let Red Mage suffer.

8BTFreek: Ha. If White Mage heard you... Anyway, that's all for now!

White Mage: Please Review!

***Chapter 5*: A Man, A Plan, A Village**

8BTFreek: Ah, the power of Chi's.

Red Mage: I thought it was "cheese."

8BTFreek: Not for me! I prefer "Chi's." It's Mexican!

Blackbelt: I like Mexican!

8BTFreek: And I've had enough of that guy. Sayonara, sucker! *Zaps Blackbelt back to 8-Bit Theater* Hm... I need a new muse. I know! *Claps hands 3 times, spins, jumps in air* Presenting...

Rand al'Thor: Huh? Who's there? Where am I?

8BTFreek: You, Dragon, are my muse! HAHAHA!

Red Mage: Welcome to Hell, sir.

Rand: Huh?

8BTFreek: *Rolls eyes* You, Rand, are my muse! I have ripped you away from the Harem you're building! MWUAHAHAHAHA! You shall keep my stories in line!

Rand: Fine. Anything to get away from those crazy women!

8BTFreek: But... Aren't you going to marry them?

Rand: So? Your point is...?

8BTFreek: Never mind. Let's just get to those reviewers!

REVIEWER RESPONSES:

Bass GSX: Yeah, it can be confusing if you don't pay attention. Thanks for the sequel news!

EchoKazul: Thank you! You're my first repeat reviewer! Yeah, Gareth is kind of messed up, but that's just because of what happened. And Kraden does get a little long-winded. As for the Valeshipping/Mudshipping thing, it's Valeshipping. Yup, I'm writing a Valeshipping fic. Just like it said in the beginning. And yes, the Dwarf Towns scenes are funny. But I like Fighter's "Quiet Game" quote the best: "Oh, what tangled webs we weave, when we play the Quiet Game".

Rain Child: It's good to be original. Bandwagon is not my thing, so I Valeship. It's just what I do best.

END RESPONSES

8BTFreek: *Whips out IGNORE Cannon* I feel a tidal wave of Flames coming on! Hit me!

Rand: Alllriiight. Here's the good news: Freek is an actual person. Here's the bad news: Freek doesn't own Golden Sun, The Lost Age, or plot ideas.

Red Mage: Actually, the bad news is he owns his plot ideas.

8BTFreek: Ahem! On to the fic! *starts singing* You know, I've never...

Red Mage: AARGH! THE SONG! *Hides under the keyboard*

****Chapter 5: A Man, A Plan, and a Village****

(On the Kalay-Bound Ship)

"Dammit, Gareth! How many times do I have to tell you? The Karagol isn't an ocean; it's just a bloody great huge sea!

Honestly, if I have to tell you one more time..." Felix walked away. Hearing Sheba and Garet fight was amusing, until you heard them go at it for the hundredth time. He looked at the others, then pulled out his sword and began practicing.

"No, you need to choke up a little on the hilt." Felix grasped the hilt tighter. "I said, choke up. The pommel isn't showing, and that's always a bad sign." He turned around. CLANGG! A rod had appeared just in time to keep the young man from getting his head cut off. "Not a bad reaction time, either. You might get better over time, if you don't make a mistake like that last one." The man took off his hood. A mane of blue hair fell around a youthful face. The blue eyes were recessed, as if he'd been guarding something for the whole night. He bowed.

"Get better over time? Do you realize who you're talking to? I've seen more battles than you've seen years, kid! I know how to hold a sword. You can't even lift one, I'd bet. Not a real sword, at any rate."

The man gestured to his rod. "Maybe not, but this is good enough for me. It's already beaten that pathetic lump of metal you call a sword." He looked off into space for a moment, blinked twice, then looked back at Felix. "Hello. My name is Alex. Who might I have the pleasure of meeting?"

Felix warily extended his hand. "Felix of Tolbi. And this 'useless lump of metal' saved my life more times than that rod's saved yours?"

Alex cocked his head. "Useless lump of metal? Why would I call a sword a useless lump? Oh, wait... Damn. Sorry, I haven't been myself since Mia left. I've grown more violent, for some reason. What were we talking about?"

{This guy is officially nuts.} "You had insulted my pride, so we were about to battle. On the other hand, it sounds like you are obviously not ready for a fight." He leant down and picked up a small chip. "On the other hand, maybe you could beat me by breaking enough chips off my sword."

The young man looked repulsed. "I, sir, do not challenge children to duels."

"Children? I'm eighteen, thank you very much. And you? I suppose you're some forty-year-old man with a limp, a crutch, and a bad attitude."

"Hell no. And 18 is still young. Back in Imil, you would have had a tough time getting that bottle of Vodka you had back in the bar." Felix glared at the man, but he just kept going. "I'm actually 23, and I'm looking for someone. Someone who isn't famous...yet." Alex glanced at his would-be opponent. "Unless I'm mistaken, you're the Commander of the Tolbian forces, right?"

"Felix, who is this?" Gareth had strolled up to them. Apparently, he had come to his senses and stopped arguing. He looked over Alex. "Well, this obviously isn't Ivan. He appears to be around 23, and he definitely isn't short."

Alex whipped his head around to look at Gareth. "Tell me, would this 'Ivan' be a Jupiter Adept, by any chance?"

"Hey, you're pretty smart, Imilan. Yeah, he's a Jupiter Adept. He's also my best friend's brother, lost for over 15 years."

Sheba walked up to him. "I thought I was your best friend, and Hama was your sister."

"You're both my best friends, but Hama isn't my sister. She just took me in after..." Gareth shuddered. He had told Felix

about the invasion of Vale fifteen years ago.

"Well, Proxan, if-" Gareth ran up to Alex, his blade pressed against the man's throat.

"Never confuse me with one of those bastards." His voice had grown cold, and a fury had crept into his eyes. "They broke into my house, when I was younger. Some Proxan bitch named Menardi killed my mother, and her shithead boyfriend Saturos tortured my father to death. Never. Mistake. Me. For. One. Of. Them." A smile crept across his lips. "Or are you one of them? I hear Imil on your voice, but accents can be learned. Or unlearned."

Sheba grabbed his shoulder. "Garet, snap out of it! Honestly, fighting Felix was one thing, but running up to a stranger and threatening him? That's just unethical! Have you forgotten everything Hama taught you?" He shuddered. Felix recognized that shudder. Gareth had probably frightened the poor Imilan. That shudder unnerved anyone.

"Sorry. My name's Gareth."

"Sorry. My name's Gareth." Alex was frightened. Not because he was facing a Mars Adept, but because this one had decided to forget Psynergy and just cut his throat. He had never seen anything so frightening. The closest he had come was hearing the reports of the invasion of Vale fifteen years ago.

"Sorry. I assumed you were a Proxan. I am sorry, Gareth of Vale. My name is Alex, of the Mercury Clan of Imil. Anyway, if this 'Ivan' you are looking for is the same Ivan I ran into in Vale, then I should warn you, he is trying to release the power of Alchemy. To what end, I do not know, but it will not

be pleasant. I was heading home to Imil after seeing Colosso."

"Well, it seems we've finally found someone we can trust." Felix clapped a hand on Alex's shoulder. Then, in a low voice, he whispered, "And you were right. I am General Felix of Tolbi." He put a finger to his lips, then walked off. After a while, he turned around. "Say, Sheba?"

The girl turned around. "Yeah, what is it?"

Felix walked back over to them. "Why don't we ask Alex to join us?"

Garet looked at him. "This guy? The guy who mistook me for one of the Proxan bastards? Nah. We don't need him."

Felix shook his head. "Ivan's probably going to Mercury Lighthouse, and this would be the perfect way to get him. Then you can take him home." He turned. "Well, what do you say?"

Sheba answered at the same time he did, and both said the same thing. "Sure. Why not?" Then, realizing what happened, Sheba said, "Felix, who were you talking to? Me, or him?"

"It doesn't matter." Felix walked off to his cabin. As an afterthought, he said, "Alex, I want you to join us for dinner. You know, just a 'team-building' exercise. Sort of like we did back in Tolbi."

(In Bilibin)

"Okay, rule number one: First things first. Find an Inn, then sightsee." Ivan looked at the others. "Got it?"

"Sure, Ivan. Let's see, how many rooms do we need?" Mia looked at them. "We don't want to get more than we need."

"We'll figure that out when we get there." Jenna walked into the city. "I've always wanted to see Lord McCoy's Palace. And the famous Talking Tree of Kolima, but that can wait."

"Jenna, maybe we should wait to see those things, okay?" Ivan looked at her. "Remember, we still need to find rooms at the inn."

"Don't worry, Ivan. I'll keep her close." Isaac wrapped his arm around the young Fire Adept. He smiled, then whispered something to her. She giggled, blushing. He muttered something. She responded by pulling his scarf over his face.

"We'll have to keep your mind clean," she said, just loud enough for the whole group to hear. Isaac turned beet red.

"Never mind. We'll just find the Inn." Ivan walked off. {I swear, I will never understand love.}

When the four Adepts got to the Inn, they found that it was so expensive they could only afford two rooms. And one of the rooms only had one bed. Isaac and Jenna took that one for some reason. Mia and Ivan were glad. Sleeping on the floor was something neither of them had in mind. Ivan walked off sightseeing with Isaac. "I tell you, that man's a profit hog. Honestly, that's almost too much to pay for a room at an Inn."

Isaac smiled. "A good businessman will always get you to buy something you don't need. Either that, or sell you something necessary at a price just high enough for you to go for it, but leave you complaining. Besides, those were the last two vacant rooms in town." He walked off toward Jenna.

Ivan couldn't help but eavesdrop. "Listen," he muttered. Suddenly, their conversation was just as loud as if they were next to him. Unfortunately, they had thought of this, and were whispering. Ivan caught snatches here and there, but they didn't mean anything. Eventually, Isaac reached to touch her, but she shied away.

"In our room, tonight." Isaac looked disappointed. "Oh, fine." She moved her face next to his. Ivan looked away.

{Are they crazy?} Ivan shook his head. He then walked toward the pair. "Uh, guys?" The two had been embracing. They quickly separated. "We'd better be getting back to the inn."

"Right." Jenna grabbed Isaac's hand, and they walked off to the inn.

{I just don't get it. Maybe Mia can explain it to me.} That very night, he asked. "Say, Mia, I have a question. Why do Isaac and Jenna go everywhere together? Why are they acting like little children?"

"Eavesdropping, were you? Well, you'll just have to find out on your own. Maybe you can ask them." A smile touched her lips. Ivan hated it when she displayed her vengeful side. It was almost as irritating as Isaac and Jenna's childish behavior.

"Forget it. Forget I said anything." Ivan went up to his room, right next to Isaac and Jenna's. From the room over, he could hear some noise. Ivan was curious, but he remembered something his grandfather had said many years ago. {Listening to two lovers while they're alone may seem like fun, but don't complain if you wind up dead.} He ignored the noise, then went to sleep. Unfortunately, he was also a light sleeper, and the noise from Isaac and Jenna's room

woke him almost immediately. "Jenna, Isaac, if you don't stop that noise, I'll knock down your door and Plasma the hell out of you both!" The noise stopped. Ivan went back to sleep quite quickly.

The next morning, Ivan woke to a strange sight. His clothes, which he had placed at the side of his bed, were missing. {Dammit, Mia, is this some kind of joke?} Quickly, he cast Reveal. Unfortunately, Mia was awake.

"Ivan, you perverted little freak! Spying on Isaac and Jenna? What's next?" Her face was red with anger.

"It's not that. I'm looking for my clothes, unless you know where they are."

"In the closet. Duh. Honestly, Ivan, I don't see how anyone could be dumber than you." She walked off, muttering the word "pervert" as she passed him.

"You could have told me that," he muttered, walking into the closet. The spell faded, and the room next door was no longer visible.

8BTFreek: Well, that wraps that chapter up.

Rand: There you are, Freek.

8BTFreek: Where were you, Rand?

Rand: Reading other fics on this site.

8BTFreek: Fine. So, why are you here now?

Rand: The guys and I have been meaning to have a chat with you.

8BTFreek: Shoot.

Alex: We have decided to call ourselves the "Fearsome Foursome!"

8BTFreek: Fine. Just stay out of the cooler. That stuff don't buy itself.

Gannon: *Looks in cooler* Hey! This thing's full of Cream Soda!

8BTFreek: *Downs a cream soda* Duh. What did you think it was? Beer?

Mario: Uh... Okay.

8BTFreek: *Picks up a cream soda* Well, that takes care of that. Review, people!

Rand: Uh, yeah. Review. Now.

***Chapter 6*: One Night In Kolima**

8BTFreek: Well, I've got some new reviewers! Let's take a look. But first, a cream soda! *Reaches for cooler, feels nothing* WHO TOOK MY JOLLY GOOD?!?!

Alex: Calm down, Freek. Mario has a solution.

Mario: Well, since you seem to need a lot of cream soda, I took the liberty of replacing your pitiful cooler with the KEG. The KEG holds more than twice as much, and it's filled with Sprecher's.

8BTFreek: *Hugs Mario* I love you! Now then, let's get to the reviews!

Review Responses:

EchoKazul: Thank you for not killing me! I like people who say I write good stories, it boosts my self-esteem (read: nonexistent self-liking). However, I must make a complaint. Will you please write another chapter in "Explanations"? It's been a while. Either that, or I check way to often. As for your question, it's not Ivan/Mia. Mia just has this thing where she takes care of her patients. I haven't written Ivan/Mia, ever. I might, though, if someone gives me a good enough reason.

Wolfy129: Thanks! I'm assuming "cute" is a compliment. Thanks for the support!

Rain Child: Hello again! Yeah, I know what you're talking about. But considering that many of the authors and authoresses on FFNet _are_ Mudshippers, it doesn't surprise me that so many of them review...although I really wish more Valeshippers would join.

lord isaac: Thank you! ^_^ Am I doing good?

End Responses

8BTFreek: Okayyy... Say, "Fearsome Foursome", wanna be my bodyguards?

FF: Sure! We need more work!

8BTFreek: Thanks!

Red Mage: Keg... Beer...

8BTFreek: No, it's Cream Soda. Get the hell away from my Sprechers! *shoves RM back*

Red Mage: Let's just get on with the story.

Alex: But before we do, let's just say this: Freek doesn't own his muses, Golden Sun, or badly written romance scenes. Because let's just face it, his pitiful attempts at writing romance really are as bad as RM says.

8BTFreek: Hey, it's called "innuendo." I think. Anyway, let's get writing!

****Chapter 6: One Night in Kolima****

(In Kolima Forest)

Jenna walked up to the gnarled old tree. Some of the knots had grown together, and it looked almost like the old wood had actually grown into a face. She touched it, then jumped back screaming as it moved.

"Would you please not scream so loud? Please, it's bad enough that I was almost cut down for that damned lady of

Bilibin, do I have to go through this as well?" The wood creaked as it moved, as if the tree hadn't spoken in years. "Never mind." The tree sighed, then assumed the rigid position again.

"Wow, I guess he really can talk." Mia went up to him. "Tell me, sir. What is troubling you?"

"What troubles me is the fact that even the people of Bilibin do not take any responsibility for their actions. They blame the lumberjacks of Kolima for the incident with my power, when it was their greed that started it. Honestly, I cannot imagine someone more self-centered than a citizen of Bilibin, unless it's the Lady McCoy herself." The huge tree sighed, then started up again. "Now then, what are your names, and why are you here? How did you get past the traps I set for the lumberjacks?"

"Well, sir," said Ivan, stepping forward, "my name is Ivan, this is Mia, and the two lovebirds over there are Jenna and Isaac." Isaac, hearing this, wriggled out of Jenna's embrace. He walked over to the tree.

"Tell me, sir, why did you put those traps there in the first place? What exactly happened that required snares and vine pits? I mean, what do you hope to gain by it?"

The great tree shook its branches. "Call me Tret. I placed those traps there to keep the Kolimen from cutting me down. I was successful, but it was a bitter success." He sighed again. "I cost many men their jobs. I realize that I saved myself, but was it worth the expense?"

Jenna walked up to him. "Tret, you mustn't blame yourself. You had every right to trap the lumberjacks if they threatened you. What puzzles me is why they would cut down the very tree that made them famous."

Ivan looked at her. "Well, according to Tret, Lady McCoy of Bilibin wanted wood from Tret to complete something she finds important, but which obviously isn't." He used Mind Read, then jumped back. "It was a palace. No wonder Tret was angry. I would be too, if someone wanted to kill me to build a palace."

Jenna looked at Isaac, then Mia, then Ivan, then Tret. "Say, Tret, what if we did something to help you?"

Tret shook his leaves, then sighed. "But what? I mean, you are young. What you say may be ignored. After all, you are only children." A tree next to him glowed for a minute, then its leaves shook.

"No, Tret. These young ones have a great destiny, if they survive to see it. This one, the Jupiter Adept... He has the Elemental Stars on him." The other tree turned the eyes that had popped open towards the Adepts. "I am sorry if I frightened you... My name is Laurel." She looked at Tret again. "Tret, the secrets of Alchemy are about to be released again. They can be trusted if they are the ones to free it."

"Very well, Laurel. There is something you can do. You must light Mercury Lighthouse. That will show us that you are the ones predicted by the Garoh prophecy. If you do not, then you are frauds." The great leaves shook. "Of course, you will probably fail. Failure is acceptable."

"We will light the beacon, Tret. You have the word of Venus Clan of the West." Isaac laid a sword at the great tree's roots. "This is the Gaia Blade. I leave it in your care until we light the beacon, as a promise. I will return to claim it."

Mia grabbed the amulet she carried around her neck, ripped it off, and placed it at Tret's roots. "This is the Amulet of

Mercury. I swear on the honor of the Mercury Clan, the beacon will be lit. I will not return until we have accomplished that goal." She whispered something, and the necklace glowed green.

Ivan walked up to Tret. "I cannot offer you anything, but I swear on-

"Enough! I will not accept any more honor-debts, or any more life-oaths, or anything else! I will simply take your word, and hold you to it! If you are going to light the beacon, exit this forest and ignite it already! Do not waste breath on your promises and oaths!" The Adepts ran out of the forest.

(In Kolima City)

"Man, Tret was really mad when we left, wasn't he?" Ivan grabbed the mug, then downed it. "I mean, really. Sending us out of the forest, just taking our word... I can see why he was amazed by Lady McCoy's behavior. Anything that defies logic must seem wrong to him! Erm, Barkeep, another mug, if you don't mind." The bartender grabbed the glass, then filled it with the strange frothy drink. "Thank you."

"You know, for not being into alcohol, you seem to drink a lot." Isaac took a large drink from his mug, then belched. Jenna slapped him. "Yeesh. That hurt, Jen. And Ivan, don't tell me that's not beer. I know the stench. Dad used to burn it when we ran out of firewood." Mia grabbed the mug from Ivan, then poured the contents on the floor.

"I don't think we need to do anything illegal while we're here. But, just to be sure. Isaac, what's in your mug?"

"Some fizzy drink. It's flavored with caramel. And no, there's no alcohol in it. I would die before taking a sip of that rubbish." Mia looked at him suspiciously. "Listen, I swear on

the honor of Asura, I didn't get anything with alcohol." This oath didn't satisfy her, though. She still grabbed the mug and took a sip. After spitting out the drink, she gave it back.

"Ugh. To each his own... But honestly, how can you drink that?" Isaac just laughed.

"Mia, if you knew why, both you and Jenna would be slugging me to death." With that, he grabbed the mug and chugged it. "Barkeep, one more, then we'll pay."

The bartender grabbed Isaac's glass, filled it with the strange substance, then said, "That'll be fifteen coins, young sir. Unless, of course, you want to pay for everyone..."

Ivan looked the man straight in the eye. "And how much would that be?"

"Well, two beers don't buy themselves, one's on the floor, I'll have to charge double 'cause you're underage, their drinks were four coins each... forty coins, young mister." Ivan dumped the coins into his hands, then exited the bar, the others following close behind.

Later that night, they arrived at the inn. "Now then, we can afford four rooms here, so we're doing that. We'll get our armor and weapons refurbished in the morning, and then it's off to Imil. Any questions? Maybe about the new policy?"

Isaac cleared his throat. "Yeah, about that. Why do we need separate rooms?"

Mia looked him in the eye. "Well, according to what Ivan said, the little lovers were a bit loud last night in their own room. This will be better for all of us, especially you and your girlfriend. If you two are separated, your love will grow." She smiled. "That, or I let you sleep out on the street together.

Either way, we get peace and quiet." Isaac and Jenna exchanged glances, then nodded.

Late that night, the door to Isaac's room opened, revealing one sleeping young man. Jenna crept in, then closed the door silently. Isaac bolted upright, sensing her presence. {Maybe tonight won't be so boring after all.} A smile crept onto his face, and she smiled. {Maybe... it will be a night to remember.}

[Author's Note: You can guess what happens next... but don't put it in reviews.]

(Crossing the Goma Range)

"Alex, if you don't stop telling Gareth those things about Mia, he won't stop having those dreams. You know the ones. The ones where he wakes up without..." Sheba stopped. Alex had realized long ago that she was a sensitive one, and was embarrassed easily. He walked up to her.

"Does this order come from Felix?" He laughed, thinking that if the General was behind this, it had to be some kind of joke.

"Actually, Felix did give me this order." At his shocked look, she added, "Well, in a manner of speaking. He didn't actually say it, but he did think it."

Alex sighed. Having a Jupiter Adept had its disadvantages. "Fine. Gareth, I'll tell you about Mia when there's nobody to hear."

"Okay." Gareth walked off. He went to his corner of the encampment. "Jeez, five miles into the range, and we still haven't discovered a cave or anything. Why did we have to go this way?" Felix walked over just as Gareth said this.

"Well, Gareth, it's because this is faster than any cave. Also, there aren't any monsters to challenge us, so it's safer. Besides, this way I can keep a closer eye on all of you." He smiled the cold smile. Alex was certain he had learned that smile in battle. "And none of you are ready for a battle against most of the monsters I've had to deal with."

Alex nodded. {Fair enough. I just hope that I find Mia soon... Maybe I shouldn't tell Gareth those stories. I don't want to force her to choose between him and me. It'd break her heart to learn that it had already been decided.} Sheba nodded. "Damn it, Sheba! Stop reading my mind!"

Her only response was a giggle. Alex roared with rage.

8BTFreek: Another one bites the dust!

Red Mage: And another one MMMPHRPHH!

Alex: Honestly, if I have to hear that song one more time... I'll flip!

8BTFreek: Come on, Alex! It's Queen. But I wasn't talking about the song. I'm talking about another chapter down!

Alex: Oh. Well, continue writing.

8BTFreek: Not until I get five reviews. It can't be that hard.

Rand: Yeah. I mean, there's a newbie fic out there that's got at least eight!

8BTFreek: I know. I'm one of the eight. I don't just hang out here writing, ya know.

Rand: Oh. Whatever. Say, who's next in rotation?

8BTFreek: Mario. Send him in with the Tanooki Suit. Got it?

Rand: Sure. Yo, Mario! Get your scrawny little ass in here with that Tanooki Suit, pronto!

Mario: I'm here! *Statue in the corner moves out into the open*

8BTFreek: You may go, Rand. *Taps KEG* Oh, and send in BM and WM. I need to have some fun.

Black Mage: We're here!

White Mage: Let's get this over with. *Sits down*

Black Mage: *Really bad pickup line*

White Mage: *Smacks him with Hammer* Creep!

8BTFreek: And this is why I don't try to hit on White Mage. Anyway, please review!

***Chapter 7*: Don't Fear the Beacon**

8BTFreek: Well, I've reached 5 new reviews since I updated, so I'm updating again!

Red Mage: That was confusing.

8BTFreek: It was supposed to be.

RM: Oh.

[Author's Note: I'm using Character name abbreviations in the intros and exits now.]

8BTF: Yup. Anyway, let's get to the reviews! *Taps KEG*

Review Responses:

Destiny Smasher: It's an AU, things are bound to be different. FYI, in case you didn't know, AU is alternate universe. And in this one, many things changed. This, of course, includes some character details. I read one where Gareth is a prince, I've read a sci-fi setting AU, I even read one where all the relations are changed around... Lots of things happen in AU stories. As for the time question... It's at the same time as the original Golden Sun, just with a few things changed. I'll get into TLA pretty soon, too. Kraden won't be in any of it, though. And why do you think I have Multiple Personality Disorder? Just asking.

Rain Child: Reviewing twice! Of course, once was probably right before I updated, but still, I count that as two reviews. I think that a truly good author and/or person will like a good story even if they disagree with some of it.

Wolfy129: Glad you like it!

EchoKazul: Truer words have never been spoken. If only they weren't so damn useful...

End Responses

8BTF: Well, there's the response section.

BM: Can you please get me out of here? I need to be alive...

8BTF: Sure thing. I'll get you out of this tight spot... if you get me RM's character sheet.

BM: Deal! *runs off*

EPS: Before we get to the story, let me just clarify: 8BTFreek doesn't own Golden Sun, horrible romances, or any 80's songs.

8BTF: You don't have to rub it in. Anyway, on with the chapter! Big battle scene here! Most of the mini-scenes are happening at the same time, because there are a bunch of independent battles going on.

****Chapter 7: Don't Fear the Beacon****

(In Imil)

Alex stood in the snow, shocked. "You say they were just here?"

The man nodded. "Yes, Healer. Mia and her traveling companions were just traveling through. They passed by not an hour ago."

Alex swore, something that took the townspeople by shock. "Where were they going?"

The weapon salesman stepped forward. "They were headed for the lighthouse. One of them was short, like her." He pointed at Sheba. "There was another one, she looked sort of like a female version of him, only with purple hair." At this, he directed a finger at Gareth. "And the other one, he was clearly in love with miss purple-hair. Looked sorta like a shorter version of that behemoth standing behind you." He pointed toward Felix.

"Thank you, Sergei. I will keep that in mind." He walked back to the others. "Well, clearly Mia is traveling with Ivan still, and they've met a couple of others." Gareth looked at him. {Mercury, why did you have to do this to me?}

Gareth spoke. "Tell me, Alex. Who were they traveling with?"

"Well, Sergei said one of them looked like you, only she had purple hair." Gareth's eyes widened with shock. Apparently, something he'd said shocked the young man. "He also said there was a young man, shorter than Felix, but with the same features." Felix's face also changed, but there was a sort of gleam in his eye. The kind of gleam that came when Alex told him about the wars he'd seen. A gleam that looked almost like Gareth's Proxan-hunting look. {If I were this young man, I would fear for my life.}

"Where were they traveling to?" Felix's voice echoed like a bell on a cold, clear night.

"Mercury Lighthouse." Alex walked mechanically in the lighthouse's direction. "This way." His legs jerked. Finally, he broke out into a run, yelling "MIA!!!"

The others followed.

(At Mercury Lighthouse, the Aerie)

Ivan tossed the small gem into the beacon just as Alex's head appeared on the other elevator. "NO!!!" he shouted. Alex jumped onto the platform. Quickly, three others joined him. One looked like he could be Jenna's brother, and one looked like a taller Isaac. The third, though, was the most beautiful girl Ivan had ever seen. Her shoulder-length blonde hair shifted slightly. He walked over to her, handing the Elemental stars to Isaac. Alex was still wailing in the background. "How could this happen? Why?"

Ivan ignored him. He instead looked at the girl. She was more beautiful up close than from a distance. A lump formed in his throat. "Hi," he said.

She batted her eyelashes, then, in a small voice, said, "Hi."

Alex looked at the man Ivan had given the Stars to. He did look like Felix, if Felix had been shorter. Felix pushed his way past Alex. "This one's mine."

"Fair enough." Alex had found the one he was looking for, anyway. He ran to her. "Mia! Mia, it's me!" Mia turned. Alex froze in his tracks. A look of cold fury had entered her eyes.

"Alex, if you take one step closer, I swear by Nereid, I will knock your head in." The same cold fury permeated her voice. All joy had been lost. Then, her gaze snapped past him, and the anger and rage sank from her eyes. She walked right past him. "Who are you?" she said.

Looking at Alex caused her to go into a deadly mood, so she looked around. Immediately, her eyes fell on a young man. He looked like Jenna, only with red hair, and he had a cold

rage in his eyes. A horrible, vengeful stare issued from those eyes. That look awakened the healing instinct in her. She walked up to the young man. "H-hello. M-my name is..." Her voice froze in her throat. He looked at her. Immediately, his gaze changed. He seemed enthralled by her. He was seemingly unable to look at anything else.

"Mia." The word was not spoken with love, but with adoration. "Alex has told me of your beauty, but I had no clue he could speak with the angels." The words seemed a bit cheesy, but they still were kind.

{And unexpected.} She tried to speak again. "Angel? I am no angel, good sir. I am not that beautiful." He merely shook his head. That's when Alex entered the picture.

"Garet, I believe she's mine, so you can stop making that face at her. Now, leave us alone. I wish to discuss things with my bride in private." Garet nodded, leaving them. However, she couldn't help but notice that he gave Alex a look of great contempt as he walked away. Suddenly, his words hit her. A wave of rage swept over the normally calm Adept.

"BRIDE?!?! How DARE you call me that? I have no intention of ever marrying you! Swine!" She struck at him with the rod he had given her those many years ago. He blocked her swing with his own rod.

"Yes, Mia. You will be my bride. Remember the Mercury Oath?" Alex smiled.

{That damned oath! That oath! He just created it! I asked, and Elder Vladimir said Alex just made that oath as an excuse for him to marry me!} "That's not a real oath. There's no such oath. Nowhere! Elder Vladimir said so!"

"Did it ever occur to you that Vlad had lost his memory?" Alex leered at her. Everyone knew that Vladimir Hail's memory had been extremely poor in his youth, but they also knew that it had gotten better with age.

"Yes, it did. Until I realized that you just wanted to marry me, and would go to any length to do it!" She swung the rod again, but changed strikes in mid-swing, going for the stomach instead of the head. Alex was sent reeling.

"So, we want to play rough, do we? I'll marry you, Mia, even if I have to beat you into submission beforehand!" He launched himself at her. The two began fighting in earnest.

Isaac spotted the General immediately. "So, Babi's favorite toy soldier comes to find the big, bad man who lit the beacon. Little General Felix, Bastard Babi's favorite grandson. The Son of a Bitch himself." Isaac smiled. "Well, hot-shot, what's it gonna be?"

Felix snarled. "I would watch my tongue. That, or get yourself out before I force you back to the personal Hell from which you came! Charon crush your spirit, kidnapper!"

Isaac grinned. "The rumor's still persisting, then? The one about how I kidnapped Faran's daughter with her permission? Or is this a new one, where I take a short blonde and his blue-haired guardian? 'Cause that's what they're thinkin' it is."

Felix raised his blade. Isaac recognized the runes on the blade. "Die, criminal!" The blade came crashing down. Isaac parried the shot with his own blade. The sword shook horribly, but he was still standing. He backed off. "Running away? I don't think so." He appeared to concentrate for a

short time. Suddenly, a group of vines rose around Isaac's feet. Isaac chopped some of the vines into ribbons, then walked out.

"So, trapping me with Growth, eh? Two can play at this game! Mother Gaia!" The ground split under Felix's feet, and he was tossed into the air as rocks flew from underneath him. He landed on his feet, a feat that could have been called nearly impossible, were it not for the fact that Felix was a Venus Adept. A fact that Isaac now recognized. "Well, Felix. You're a Venus Adept. Why I didn't see it sooner, I'll never know, but now I know there's only one way to defeat you." He bowed. "Isaac, son of Dora and Kyle, of Lalivero."

Felix returned the bow. "Felix, Captain-General of the Guard of Tolbi." The two blades clanged back and forth. The duel had begun.

Garet walked over to the young woman sitting on the edge. He looked at her. {It can't be... She was proclaimed dead. The Great Healer even said... He said she was gone for good. Even so, I always thought...} "Aria." He said the word quietly. {That was what they called her. That was my sister's name. And she looks like she could be my sister.} But there was no response from the girl sitting there. He tried again. "Aria, it's me. It's your brother." She seemed confused. He tried again. "Aria, it's Garet. Don't you remember?" He tapped her shoulder.

She turned around quickly and got up. "Who is this 'Aria'? Who are you? What do you want with me?" A frightened look appeared in her eyes. "What do you want?"

"Aria, it's me. I'm your brother, Garet." At the confused look on her face, he said, "Garet. Your younger twin. Aria, please,

say you recognize me." A tear slid down Gareth's cheek. He had finally found his sister, only to discover she had amnesia. That was the only explanation. {Maybe I can knock the memory back into her!} "Aria!" She swung her blade upward, but Gareth blocked it.

"My name is Jenna! Who is this 'Aria' you are talking to?" Aria struck again, and Gareth leapt back. She swung again, and again, and eventually Gareth had no choice but to swing back.

"Aria, it's me! Your brother! Your only living relative! Remember, dammit! Remember!" And with that, he began to duel his sister.

"Maybe we should get out of here. Our friends are fighting." Ivan nodded, but just stood there. Sheba grabbed his arm, then led him to the elevator. {Foolish man! Does he have to be led to everything?} She tried using Mind Read, just so she could understand why he was acting so foolishly.

{Sheba... a golden-haired angel named Sheba...} She blushed. Some of the thoughts she saw were definitely not intended for her viewing. Suddenly, her mindlink was cut. Instead, her thoughts were flowing towards him. And some of those thoughts were definitely not ones she wanted him to see. Catching her stern look, he said, "Hey, if you can look into my mind, I can look into yours. Those last few were private."

{Listen to the pot call the kettle black.} "Anyway, why are you here? And why do you want Alchemy back so badly? I mean, it's not like the world needs it... Right?" Ivan just stood there. "I am right, aren't I? I mean, Alchemy is a force

of evil, isn't it?" He shook his head, but stayed silent. "Ivan, answer me!"

He turned around, then walked on to the elevator. Sheba ran after him. "Sheba, I'd rather not discuss what I'm doing right now. I'm feeling rather disoriented. Having your mind attacked by surprise tends to do that to you, in case you haven't noticed." He turned toward her. "Let's talk about each other. That will make us happier, at any rate." She nodded.

(Four hours later, on the Aerie)

Garet and his companions were backed into a corner. Finally, the man that was fighting Felix shouted, "Mia! Use Tundra! Freeze them and let's get out of here!"

Mia nodded. She looked at Garet, her eyes apologizing for the deed she was about to do. Her gaze then turned to Alex. "Tundra," she said. Garet and his comrades froze in place. Mia sobbed. "I'm sorry, Garet." She ran off to the elevator with her friends. It started to move down.

Alex shouted at Garet. "Garet! We need to melt this ice. Use your strongest Psynergy."

Garet nodded. "Flare Wall!" The ice cracked, then melted, then disappeared.

(At the bottom)

"Please, Sheba! I just can't throw aside my mission, even for love." Ivan was begging by now. {If only I could tell her... But she wouldn't believe me if I did.} "I can't stop, or the elements will be out of balance!"

Sheba shook her head. "I'm sorry, Ivan. I just can't." She hid her face. "I swore to protect Jupiter Lighthouse from anyone that tried to light it..." She sobbed into the sleeve of her robe. "I can't! I just can't!"

Ivan looked at her. "I am sorry, but I can't let you stop me. But I swear that I will not fight you unless I am forced to. I love you too much to do that." He looked at her again. {She is who you are fighting for. Not your grandparents, not Vale, not even Weyard. You are fighting for her. She is your only care, isn't she?}

Sheba glanced at him. {Is it true? Would you really fight to protect me?}

Ivan was shocked. Unless his mind was tricking him, he could actually hear her voice in his head. {Sheba, is that you?}

{Yes. Hama taught me this. You know-the sister I told you about.}

Ivan's throat tightened. {And only Jupiter Adepts can do this?}

{Yes.}

{So... Nobody can hear what we're saying?}

{Just us.}

But before Ivan could tell Sheba just what he thought of her, Isaac and his friends came into view. "Ivan, we need to get-" He spotted Sheba. "Ivan! Do you realize who this is?"

"Yes, Isaac. But I can't help it. I love her." He looked at her. {And I would do anything if I could just spend eternity with

her.}

Sheba turned beet red. "Ivan, you really should go with them. If Gareth or Alex catches you..." Her face became white with fright. Ivan could sense her running through the possibilities. But Ivan didn't care what happened to him.

"Ivan, we need to light the beacons. And we can't do that if you aren't there!" Jenna was at his side. "Besides, she's traveling with General Felix and his 'friends.' We're bound to see her again." She grabbed his arm. "So say good-bye, then come back to the inn. We'll meet you there." The others went off.

"Well, I guess this is good-bye, for now." Ivan knelt next to Sheba, taking her hand in his.

"Yeah. You'd better get going."

Ivan said nothing. Instead, he stood, then kissed her cheek. As she touched the spot faintly, Ivan ran off into the distance, shouting "I'll find you! I swear on my honor!"

"I'll find you! I swear on my honor!" He ran off. She looked after him.

{Take care, o knight of mine. O knight of Alchemy.} She turned around to see the elevator grind to a halt a few feet away. "Alex? Gareth? Felix? What happened?"

"Long story," said Gareth. "Where were you? Did you find Ivan?"

"Yeah, I did. We left as you were fighting." She stood up, drying her tears. "Let's just find them, okay?" She walked off

toward the spring in front of the lighthouse. {Hermes Water, capable of healing all wounds. But can it heal a broken heart?}

(On Mount Aeron, highest peak in the Bilibin Range)

"I can see from here. That Ivan fellow has lit the beacon." Agatio climbed down from his post. "Contact the Elders. They will want to know."

Karst grabbed the small black orb, then spoke. "Elder Saturos, Elder Menardi, we bring joyful news!"

Her sister's voice echoed around the clearing, and her face appeared in the orb. "Karst? Is that you? What is this good news?"

"The beacon has been lit!"

"Then why are you not there?"

"Remember that young Ivan that I told you about?" Menardi muttered something, then Saturos's face appeared in the orb, replacing her sister.

"What has Ivan of Vale got to do with this?"

"He has the Stars." Karst sighed. "We failed to get them from him, and we were buried under Mount Aleph for a few days."

"That's serious. But tell me, what do you want us to do?" The image in the orb split, and Menardi's face popped into view.

"Well, Saturos, we could get them and bring them back."

"No!" Karst's voice echoed in the clearing. "We will not go back until we have the Elemental Stars! We promised we would bring the Stars to Prox! We must not fail our oath!"

Unfortunately, the Elders were already talking about sending them back. {I'll probably be ignored, then forgotten... I'll be remembered as the first Kommandant in need of a rescue!}

"Very well. We will come to aid you." Menardi's voice echoed through the clearing.

"What? Both of us? But Menardi, only the Proxans know of the Repentance! Everyone else thinks I'm still..." Saturos's image wavered, then came back into focus. Menardi said something to him that only he could hear. "Fine. I'll come with, but I'll be in the black hood and the grey mask. We're coming to aid you in your search. Meet us in Bilibin. End transmission." Saturos and Menardi disappeared from the orb.

"Agatio, pack up. We're headed for Bilibin. The elders are meeting us there to aid us in the search for the shrimp." She grabbed the orb, then wrapped it back in the white cloth.

8BTF: Well, that was the chapter. Can anybody guess what the orb was?

RM: Never mind the orb, why did you put in that corny love scene?

8BTF: Red Mage...

Rand: Was he threatening you, sir?

8BTF: No. Now, send in the next in rotation.

Rand: Yes, sir. Gannon! Get your trident and report for duty!

Gannon: Awww... but I wanted to use the Aganihm suit!

8BTF: It's okay. Use the suit.

Gannon: Yeah! *Grabs Aganihm disguise and puts it on*
Ready to protect, Freek.

8BTF: Okay. Let's see... Oh yeah! I'm going to drop the "X requests until I update" thing, it just didn't work with my personality.

RM: You only tried it once!

8BTF: Well, once was too much! Anyway, please review! And Froeliche Weinachten!

RM: That's "Merry Christmas," for those of you that don't know German. Please review!

WM: Merry Christmas, and a Happy New Year!

BM: Happy Hanukkah!

Alex: And a festive holiday season, for all you Politically Correct people!

Mario: See you in '04!

EPS: And, for more fun, read some of the fanfics of Freek's Favorite Stories list! He thinks they're good!

8BTF: Well, they are! Merry Christmas, and don't forget to Review!

***Chapter 8*: Xian Dreams**

8BTFreek: 2004 at last! PARTY! PARTY! PARTY!

RM: Shut up. You can't party; you've got work to do. Like writing this fic.

Freek: No, RM, you shut up. I'm going to write when I feel like it.

BM: I'd suggest you start feelin' like it right now.

Freek: Fine. Rand, come in and introduce the new chapter, please!

Rand: Nah. You need to acknowledge your reviewers first.

Freek: Oh yeah, those guys! Well, let's get to the responses! Three reviewers... Well, I guess it was Christmastime.

Reviewer Responses:

Pureauthor: Glad you like it! It's my first one, and my first Multi-chapter fic. And yes, Windshipping is good. Very good.

Rain Child: Thanks! You're right, Political correctness sucks. Unfortunately, it's also what people like, for some strange reason.

DarkHunter65: Glad you like it. But there's more to it than Valeshipping. If that was it, I'd probably have made it just another Mudshipping fic. But I'm not like that. I actually write because I want to.

Mesoforte: THANK YOU! And thanks for liking the story too!

End Responses

Freek: And nobody figured out the orb was a palantir. Oh well. Now then, on to the story!

RM: I'll play disclaimer this time. 8BTFreek doesn't own Golden Sun, "One Night in Bangkok", "(Don't Fear) The Reaper", or "Sweet Dreams". He does, however, own this fic. It's a real shame, to see his talent reflected in this way. It just shows how pathetic a writer he is.

Freek: *Raises Seven* RM, I would be a bit more careful. *Sheathes the blade* Anywho, on with the fic!

****Chapter 8: Xian Dreams****

(In Xian)

"Well, I thought Nyunpa was just plain weird. And I don't get what he meant about this 'Forest of Darkness' thing. I mean, we just crossed the Mogall Plains after we stopped there." Jenna picked up another chicken leg and began chewing on it.

"Maybe he meant the forest that sprung up right after we crossed the plains?" Ivan grabbed the pair of sticks, then used them to slurp up the noodles. "After all, there was a forest after we left, and it seemed like a dark enough place to be a 'Forest of Darkness.' That's what I think."

Isaac stood up. "Jen, I hate to say it, but I agree with Ivan. The forest that popped up after we crossed the prairie... It was unnatural. Almost like Cybele planted her garden there. It just wasn't supposed to be like that, I can sense it." He walked off.

"Boy, he's in a hurry to get somewhere." Mia rubbed the Mercury Amulet. "I wonder what he's planning on doing..." She shook her head. "I'm just curious."

{Aren't we all, Mia?} "Yeah, but I wouldn't worry. He's going to be safe." Ivan laughed into his plate.

"Well, are the two little women fighting over the big, strong man? It sure sounds like it."

"Don't worry, Ivan. We aren't fighting over you or Isaac. We're just worrying, like normal human beings." {I hope he's safe. It would be so horrible if he died...}

"Like a part of you dying?" Ivan whispered. Jenna slapped him. "Jeez. Y'know, I think it's hard being a Jupiter Adept sometimes. The impulse is just too much to take." Upon hearing that remark, Mia slapped him.

"Pervert." Ivan looked directly at her.

"That's not true. I'm no more a pervert than you are. I just get curious sometimes... And my curiosity isn't something like a passing fancy. I get most of my information that way. The rest is just lucky guesses or common knowledge. Like Isaac and Jenna. I know what I know because of my abilities, not because I spy on them every waking moment. I just get curious, and look." A heavy hand caught the back of his hand. A gauntleted hand.

"Then maybe we'd better train that impulse out of you," came Isaac's voice from behind him. "We can get better armor here, and we need it. After all, we're going to be facing monsters of all sorts, and you never know when good armor can save your life. This dusty old relic I dragged from my parents' basement needs to be reforged, and these gauntlets need replacing."

Ivan nodded. "Yeah, I could use a better weapon. I mean, this blade is okay, but I could use something stronger."

"And I could use some new robes. These old things are really beginning to wear out." Mia sat back, then grabbed the strange sticks and began eating the fish.

"It's settled, then. We'll get our supplies today, then head off tomorrow." Isaac walked out again.

"Well, we'd better follow him." Ivan got up, then headed out the door.

"Isaac, don't go without me!" Jenna raced out the door. She saw Ivan and Isaac waiting for her. "Thank Weyard! You haven't gone off to who knows where." Ivan looked at her, and it was obvious that he was confused.

"Did you think your little boyfriend would leave you behind?" Ivan caught her deadly glare, then shut up.

"Jenna, I'd never leave you behind. Honestly, I was just waiting for you out here." He also caught a disapproving glare, but he just kept going. "Listen. If I'd ever wanted to leave you, it was back in Lalivero when I was running off. And that was because I didn't want to risk losing you to some monster on the road. My heart..." He stopped in mid-sentence.

"Well, now that that's cleared up, can we please go get new armor?" Mia walked off down the road.

"Erm, Mia? The armor shop is this way. You're walking toward the Silk fields." Isaac looked at Jenna. "And no, I won't buy you a set of silk robes. They cost way too much, and this is Xian. In Tolbi, the price will be unbelievably high." She

slapped him. "Jen, you're doing that too often. It's really starting to get annoying."

Jenna looked at him. {I only do that when he deserves it.}

"No, just when you think he deserves it." She slapped Ivan. "And yes, you do that too much." Jenna just shook her head, then followed Isaac to the Armory.

(In Mogall Forest)

"How long are we gonna be in this damn forest?" Alex was growing tired. "I mean, it's going on forever."

"Yeah, it's like Kraden's latest work. You know-that work he printed a year ago? The one about Alchemy?" Sheba looked at him. "But still, we have to go on. After all, Kraden's paper had an end. This forest will too. And if it doesn't, we'll make one. Now then, which way did that monster go?" She began looking down the trail.

"It's this way, guys. Honestly, if you can't keep up..." Felix was already far ahead of them. "Well?"

"Dammit, General." He visibly cringed. Ever since they had learned his true title, they had tormented him at every opportunity. "Not all of us have had military training, you know." Still, Sheba decided that speed was necessary. "Zephyr, unleash." The guardian Djinn complied, causing all of them to move faster. The three of them ran to catch up with Felix.

Garet was out of breath by the time they reached him. "Did you have to be so far ahead, General? Gaah." He took a deep breath. "You know, when we reach Xian, the first thing I'm gonna do is buy Mia a silk dress."

Alex looked at him. "Well, I'll buy her a sapphire pendant."

Garet shot back, "Well, I'll buy her flowers, and a gold necklace!"

Alex turned to face him. "That's nothing! I'll-" Felix's hand hit him in the lungs, causing him to lose his breath.

"ENOUGH! Honestly, fighting over a woman? What next?" Felix looked at the two of them. "There will be no mention of Mia until we reach Lalivero, understood?"

Sheba turned to face him. "They're never going to stop arguing over her. It's almost like Ulysses and Zagan..." {Oh, how I loved to hear that one.} At their confused looks, she explained. "According to the legends, Zagan and Ulysses were both in love with Megaera, the Queen of the South. They fought for her marriage, but Ulysses was more powerful, and he won the battle. Even so, Megaera chose Zagan because he touched her heart by fighting for her honor." Sheba nodded. "I think we have a similar case here. Mia is most definitely Megaera. Only time will tell who is Ulysses and who is Zagan."

"That's just a romance. Who has time for those?" Alex nodded in agreement. "Anyway, where were we? Oh yeah, where's your retort?" Felix stepped between the two of them.

"Listen, if you're going to keep arguing over Mia, then I'll marry her. So no arguing, okay? Damn, I'm getting tired for this. Imagine, marrying some girl that I don't even know... Gilt would kill me if she found out." He realized that the last part had been said aloud, and blushed. At their confused looks, he said, "Gilt's my girlfriend. She helped me to survive on the street before I was recruited on some

Colosso team. I promised I'd marry her. I even bought the ring. So don't make me mess it up!" Felix walked off.

"Touch-y," said Sheba. {Then again, he does have a lover. That's something.}

(Master Feh's School)

Jenna stood in the door, watching for anyone that might try to harm them. Ivan was busy learning about weaponless combat from Master Feh, and Isaac was practicing with his sword in a corner. Mia was teaching some of the students about medicinal herbs and plants, something Master Feh obviously appreciated. Suddenly, a young girl came in from the back room. "Father, where is Hsu?"

Master Feh turned to the girl. "Feizhi, I have already told you. Hsu is at Lama Temple, being instructed by the monks. There is nothing to worry about." He went back to watching Ivan, making sure he understood the basics.

"But Father," Feizhi said, "I sense something wrong with Hsu! Something bad is about to happen!" Master Feh looked at his daughter in surprise.

"Feizhi, there is nothing wrong with your beloved. Hsu is merely training at Lama Temple. In fact, today he will return. Just wait. He will come back unharmed." Feh went back to teaching. "No, Ivan. Kick from the hip. That causes much pain." Ivan repeated the maneuver. "Better. Keep working. I will check later."

Feizhi walked over to Jenna. "Listen. Something is going very wrong. Someone must go check for Hsu. I have this... this feeling. Something bad is happening. Someone must find Hsu and warn him." Jenna nodded. "You will do this?" Jenna

noded again. "Thank you. I will head out to Lama Temple myself, if you do not return."

Jenna clapped a hand on Feizhi's shoulder. "Don't worry, we'll find Hsu. We'll bring him back if he's injured." She turned to Isaac. "Isaac! Pack it up with the weapon training! We're leaving!"

"Sure, Jen. Oy, Ivan!" Ivan looked up from his practice. "Jen says we gotta go! Let's move out! You too, Mia!" Ivan walked over to Master Feh and paid for his lessons. Mia packed up her herbs, and tried to walk out the door. Master Feh stopped her.

"Lady Mia, I insist. Here is your payment." He gave her 100 coins, then added a strange bottle. "Use it if you are badly hurt. I wish you well on your travels. Oh, and Master Ivan... Good work today. I have a feeling you know the basics well enough now." He turned to Isaac. "Master Isaac, I have never seen anyone wield a weapon with such grace. It is as if you are dancing. May your life and love be so graceful." He bowed. Then, to Jenna, he said, "Lady Jenna... Remember why you love, and you will be filled with joy." As they exited, he closed the door behind him.

(At Altin Pass)

Isaac walked ahead of the rest. "Something doesn't seem right. The earth in these parts is close to giving way." A noise, almost like a distant rolling thunder, hit their ears. A shadow appeared under their feet. "RUN!!!"

Ivan heard panic in Isaac's voice. {Damn! Gotta run!} Ivan was the last one to start running.

THUD!!! The first of the boulders hit the ground.

Freek: Well, that's my first Cliffhanger ending! Don't worry, I'll update as soon as I can find another song name to parody for the title. In fact, why not do that? I'll have a contest! Name chapter 9! There's only one rule: The title of the chapter has to do with Altin.

RM: Those contests almost never work! You know that!

Freek: Yeah they do!

RM: Whatever.

Rand: Say, Freek! I'm going on vacation.

Freek: As long as you stay away from your home world.

Rand: I'm not going back there for a while.

Freek: Okay. Well, that wraps up the chapter! Please be kind and review!

***Chapter 9*: Altin Rhapsody**

8BTFreek: So sad... Only one review... What happened?

RM: Maybe it's 'cause you almost forgot them last time? Or because you insulted their intelligence with that last chapter?

Freek: Oh hush, you asshole.

RM: Hey, just trying to show you the truth!

Freek: Anyway, let's just respond to the review, eh?

REVIEWER RESPONSES:

A Christian Loser: Maybe I'm just dense, but I don't see anything in the Wheel of Time about stuff like that... Anyway, thanks for reviewing my story! I was beginning to think that nobody would review. And you are NOT a loser. Case closed. About Gilt... That information is classified until such time as the author decides to reveal it.

END RESPONSES

Freek: And, since nobody gave me a title, the title for chapter 9 is...

RM: They're going to see it anyway.

Freek: So? It's Altin Rhapsody. Parody on the title "Bohemian Rhapsody," which has got to be one of the greatest songs ever written. But first, I've gotta get that IGNORE Cannon back from DarkHunter 65! Gannon, you do the disclaimer!
Dashes out the door

Gannon: Whatever. Freek don't own Golden Sun. He also don't own no songs that he parodies in the chapter titles.

RM: Let's just get on with the fic. You know, we need to work on your grammar... 'Cause it's bugging the hell out of me!

Gannon: That's what I'm trying to do!

****Chapter 9: Altin Rhapsody****

(At the crossroad)

THUD!!! Another boulder crashed down. Ivan looked back. The way things were going, the pass would be blocked off, and the only way to get anywhere would be to go around, either through Altin or through the mountains. Ivan quickly followed the others into Altin. What he saw shocked him. "Is this really Altin?"

"Yeah," said a man behind him, "this is Altin. Betcha didn't expect us to be covered in water. After all, Altin's known for its gems, not a seaside location. But look! It's like we moved it to the coast, with all this water here."

Isaac looked down. He could see something spewing water into the village center, which was mostly submerged. "Look there, Ivan. Something's flooding the town. I bet if we defeat it, the town will drain and we can go through."

"But one monster can't have made all this," said Jenna. "There must be more. Well, let's get going!" Jenna strode off to fight the creature.

"What's she thinking? That's obviously a water beast! It'll tear her apart!" Isaac ran off down to where Jenna was, Ivan and Mia quickly following along. "Jen, stop! You can't defeat it on your own!" The thing heard them, then ran off into a

cave. The three followed it. The beast was clearly frightened. It ran to the other side of the cave, then started spewing water again. The four Adepts quickly finished off the creature. As it died, it left behind a small gem. Jenna picked it up. Strange runes were carved on it.

"I feel... strange," she said. "Almost like I've just learned something I shouldn't have." She handed Isaac the gem. "Can you understand this?"

He held the gem up to the light. Sure enough, he could feel some odd Psynergy flowing through him. He shook himself mentally, then looked at the gem again. Written on it in ancient runes was a spell. Faintly, he could detect something inside it, but he had no clue what it was. "Ivan, you take a look."

"Reveal." Slowly, the words on the gem began to become clearer. "This gem shall grant the power of Frost to its user. Well, I don't know what it is, but it's clearly very powerful. Jenna, since you're the one that found it, you should be the one to use it."

"But... Never mind. I'll take it, sure." She grabbed the gem, shuddering as she grasped it. "Let's see what it can do. Frost." Quickly, a small snow flurry settled at her feet. She gasped. "Amazing..."

Mia looked at her. "That's what it does? It just casts a simple 'Frost' spell? Well, jeez! Why didn't I see it before? This is clearly pulsing with Mercury Psynergy!" Quickly she made to grab the gem, but Jenna stopped her.

"Look, it was entrusted to me, so I'll keep it, thank you!" With that, she held the gem tighter in her arms. "I just wish it wouldn't be so cold."

"A-HEM! Let's just get going, okay? We still need to get through that mine." Ivan walked off, headed for town. "And I need some rest," he muttered.

(In Xian)

"Excuse me, sir. I'm looking for a silk dress, not too flashy, but very nice-looking, for a girl with blue eyes, blue hair, and..."

"Ah. I may have seen the girl. Was she traveling with a young blonde man?" The shopkeeper looked at Gareth questioningly. Gareth nodded. "She refused to buy anything, but I saw her looking at this dress as if she wanted it. Maybe you will buy it for her?" He held up a pale blue dress with sapphires running down the neckline. "A cheap price for such a piece of work. Only 2,000 coins! Very cheap price." Gareth eagerly handed over the money.

"Let's see Alex beat this!" he said, walking out of the shop.

Alex watched as Gareth walked out of the trading post. "So, what did you get her?"

Gareth shrugged. "Nothing special. Just some silk dress she'd been admiring, according to the shopkeeper." Sheba walked up to the man, and asked if there had really been a young blue-haired girl.

"Yes, yes. She was traveling with two blonde men, one tall and one short, and a magenta-haired girl. One of the men was wearing gray robes." Sheba read his mind, just to be sure. She nodded.

"Thank you." She walked back to Gareth. "Gareth, according to the shopkeeper's mind, you just did the right thing. He was just thinking about how lovely she would have looked in that

dress." Her voice had taken on a falsely sweet quality. "If only I could reach him across the counter... I'd slap him so hard he'd be feeling aches and pains for three weeks straight." The last few words were said in a no-nonsense tone of voice that made it perfectly clear that she would find a way to make him hurt.

Garet's mouth hung open. "And he was thinking that about MY Mia?" Alex walked up to him, fury blazing in his eyes.

"She's not yours, she's mine! And don't you forget it!" Garet slugged him. Alex's response was a swift kick in the shins. Soon, the two were brawling.

Garet felt a hand on his shoulder just as he was about to knock one of Alex's teeth out. "That will be enough. Honestly, if I see you two fighting over her again, I'll... I'll... I'll do something so horrible, I haven't even thought it up yet!"

Garet got up. Alex needed help, though. Felix extended a hand. "And I'm warning you. Any funny bruises, any knocked-out teeth, anything you can't explain... I'll make that one an example for the other." He stalked off. "Honestly," he muttered, "why can't they just get along?"

The others ran up to meet him. "Sorry, General. It's just..." Garet hung his head. "I can't explain it. It's something about her. Something..."

Alex tried explaining, too. "She's just... She's... She's the kind of girl that makes normal, respectable men turn into animals. She's an angel. And she's mine." Garet shook a fist, but that was all.

{Honestly, when will Alex realize? She doesn't love him. I could see it in her eyes. She had a sort of smile on her face

when she froze us, and she was looking at him. She couldn't bear to look at me.} Sheba looked at him.

"Can I read your mind now? Honestly, it's getting boring, not knowing what you're thinking." Gareth just nodded, letting her read. Quickly she got to what he was thinking now. "Oh my... Now I see what you mean. I wouldn't know if you're right or not, but it sounds like you've convinced yourself. But I would recommend giving her the gift after you've found out whether or not she loves you back." She walked off. Gareth could swear he heard her utter, "Men. When will they learn there's more to a girl than her looks?"

(Altin Mine, Ancient Ruins)

Jenna gripped her rod, then called out, "Serpent Fume!" A large flame snake burst from the ground, crashing into the water monster's body. Slowly, the large beast turned to stone. It was now a statue. As she walked up to touch it, it crumbled. Behind it was a small chest. Ivan opened the box and pulled out a rune-covered gem. This one was purple, and had different runes on it.

"Reveal." Once again, the runes became readable. "I give you the might of the wind, the power of Lift." He tucked the stone into his pocket. "For safekeeping. Now then, let's get outta here!"

They quickly climbed out of the mine, then made their way down a discarded passageway that led to Lama temple. First, though, they checked back at Silk Road Pass. Standing in the gap was Feizhi, trying to pull a man out of a rock. Quickly, they ran through a passageway, making their way into the clearing. Jenna looked over the situation. "Let me guess, this is Hsu, right?"

Feizhi looked at Jenna. "Yes, lady, this is Hsu. We must hurry, or he will be trapped here a long time. Perhaps too long." Jenna nodded, then motioned for the others to join her.

"Listen, if we all push out on this boulder, he should be free. Everybody ready? Push!" They all pushed against the rock, but it didn't move. "Push!" They tried again, but failed.

"I know!" shouted Ivan. Quickly, he stood in front of the boulder. "Lift." The boulder floated into the air. The others grabbed Hsu and pulled him out from underneath. Ivan relaxed, and the boulder dropped back into the ground. Feizhi walked over to Ivan and gave him a small bag.

"I had offered a reward to whoever found Hsu, but nobody wanted to help. Thank you for helping me." Ivan gave back the bag.

"We don't need the money, do we?" Isaac and the others shook their heads. "Keep it. You'll need it more than us." She made to shake her head, but Ivan forced the coins back into her palm. "Keep them. I don't need it. I just wanted to help." She made to respond, but he just shook his head. "I don't need a reward. I just did what I thought was right." She sighed, then nodded. Quickly, she wrapped her arm around Hsu, then walked off in the direction of Xian. "Let's just keep going, okay? How about we go to Kalay? They've probably forgotten all about you by now." Isaac paused, then nodded.

"Yeah, you're probably right. But still, we could always go around, using Silk Road." Jenna nodded in agreement. Mia nodded too.

"Isaac's right, Ivan. Silk Road would be easier, and we wouldn't have to risk Isaac being seen." Ivan nodded, then shrugged.

"Fine. Silk Road it is." They headed off toward the Lamakan Desert, one of the necessary paths of the Silk Road.

Gannon: Well, Freek isn't back yet...

Freek: Yes I am! I've just come back! But I should warn you, I couldn't get the IGNORE Cannon back. I heard semiautomatic fire from the house, and I'm not exactly ready to go back and get it.

Gannon: Okay. Well, R&R people!

Freek: Yes, please! I need more reviews!

Gannon: Say, when's Rand coming back from his vacation?

Freek: Beats me. I don't even know where he is!

(On a Caribbean Island)

Rand: Woohoo! This beats being a muse any day! More punch, please!

(Back in the FreekLair (c))

Freek: Oh well. It doesn't matter. R&R, please!

***Chapter 10*: Encounters**

8BTFreek: Hm... Rushing chapters, he says... Well, I'll just give you that little break as proof that I can wait... Too good, too rosy... I'll give you that...

RM: What are you talking about?

Freek: Oh, just the reviews of my last chapter.

RM: But you're probably the most impatient son of a gun on FFNet!

Freek: I doubt that. Anyway, let's just get on to the reviews.

REVIEWER RESPONSES:

Pureauthor: Wow, one of my favorite authors reviewing. Okay, I'll take that chapter-rushing thing into consideration. But honestly. Baby Isaac? As for battle scenes... I never was too good with writing armed combat. As for the "coming up roses" bit... That's just incredible luck. Besides, bad things happen to them. One's happening very soon. And a major bad thing/plot device for mini-group one (aka Isaac and co.) actually happens closer to Venus Lighthouse. Trust me, it ain't pretty. And as for the chapter-rushing thingy... I'm just impatient. I write when I feel like it (that's also while I should be doing homework, but I don't care!), and post almost as soon as a chapter's done. However, this one will wait. Thanks for the suggestion with the Lamakan, but trust me, I've got something better planned... Just wait. And yes, I am male. How often do you find a gal who describes herself as a geek?

A Christian Loser: Well, I guess I am rushing through chapters quite quickly (but only 'cause I'm impatient and I write when I should be doing homework-but it's so easy I can do it in a minute...), but I do agree about the battle scenes. And I haven't read the "His Dark Materials" trilogy. Although I have heard it's well-written and it does have some "Angry at the Church" things in it. And yes, I don't do much of battling. And yes, the Garet/Alex conflict is a major part of the plot and will eventually lead to some unexpected consequences. And I do think that they are getting off a little easy, but then again, the same happened during the entire first game! Oh, and... I read your bio, but you insist you're a loser too. Well, if you're a loser, then so am I. And I'm no loser.

Allexandra Radcliffe: Uh, don't threaten me... *pulls out Gaia Blade* I can defend myself! Anyway, thanks for liking the story. Not liking some of the shipping, well, I review Mudshipping stories, even though I'm a rabid Steamshipper.

END RESPONSES

RM: Wow. You probably could have written a whole chapter with just your responses.

Freek: *Sheaths Gaia Blade* Well, I had a lot to say.

RM: Well, let's see the chapter.

Freek: Sure. Erm, this chapter mainly focuses on what happens to Felix after they enter Tolbi. Trust me, this is going to be "fun" for everyone.

RM: And Freek doesn't own Golden Sun.

Freek: Yeah. Say, does anyone know what Rand's up to?

(Spaceball One)

Rand: And you want us to go that fast because...?

Dark Helmet: Do not question me! Ludicrous Speed, GO!

(The FreekLair (c))

RM: Well, let's get on to the fic anyway.

****Chapter 10: Encounters****

(Somewhere in the mountains)

Isaac looked. "Hey, a town!"

Ivan cast reveal. "Uh, Isaac? That's not a town, that's a colony." The others looked at him. "Well, when Xian went on its major conquest, as every civilization is apt to do, they colonized a small section of land south of the mountains. Unfortunately, the town was attacked by pirates from Alhafra soon after its founding, and Xian just let it be." By the end of his short history speech, Jenna had fallen asleep and Isaac was on the close to doing the same. Mia, on the other hand, had snuck up behind him and was about to throttle him.

"Ivan, the next time you feel like imitating Kraden, don't talk to us. Talk to yourself." Mia stalked off. {That damn Jupiter Adept! Always reading our minds, taking peeks at Isaac and Jenna when they're alone... He's perverted. I don't care what he says, that's the only explanation. And why did we have to go around the desert? We could have handled it!} Ivan shook his head. Mia jumped up. "Ivan, would you please stop reading my mind! Dammit, can I get no privacy?" She looked over at Isaac and Jenna. Seeing them together made her angry. "And you two! You may have each other, but Ivan and

I are in love with people that want to stop us! If we can't see our loves, then you shouldn't display your affection!" She stormed off toward the colony.

A few hours later, she was hanging by her ankles.

Ivan was next to her, but she was extremely happy to see that he was hanging by his wrists. Unfortunately for her now very short temper, the two lovers were chained together, and it looked like they weren't planning on trying to free themselves anytime soon. "Oh, Nereid," she muttered. "Do they have to keep doing that when they aren't alone?" She looked at them. "Ooh, maybe I could try that with Garet..." She mentally slapped herself. {I'm turning into a pervert like Ivan!} Ivan shook with laughter next to her. "Oh, no. Oh, hell no!"

"Well, we're the only two without lovers." She tried to punch his stomach, but the blow landed a little lower than she expected. "Eep!" Ivan's voice rose to a feminine pitch. "Did you have to hit me there? Yeeow! Ooh! Aah! Jees!" He was now obviously in pain, but nobody could help him. Mia wasn't about to put her hands near that part again, and Isaac was too involved with Jenna. "Hello? Could I get some help here?" His voice was still a squeak, but it was more masculine now. "Please?"

Mia sighed. "Over here. If I must, I must." She concentrated hard, then said "Ply." Ivan gave a slight "aah" of relief. Or maybe it was pleasure. Just to be sure, she whacked him in the gut. But this time, she aimed for the chest, so it actually landed where she intended. Before Ivan could react, though, the door creaked open.

"Gitcher close on, yew two. Yer summand afore the court of 'er Graice Obaba. Norm'ly, 'er son Briggs wood presoid, but

'e's out 'a town. If yeh ah'nt poirats, then she'll prob'ly let yeh go." He unlocked Mia and Ivan, then walked them out of the dungeon into the high reaches of the cliffs. Mia tried to cast Ply again, but it didn't work now that they were above ground.

{Something must be draining our Psynergy,} she thought. Ivan looked at her.

"Do you think there's something up here blocking our Psynergy?" She glared at him. He continued. "I mean, I tried reading your mind to see if you agreed with what I thought, but I couldn't even get a hint of your usual loathing for me." She was looking daggers at him. Ivan shut up soon afterward.

Isaac looked at their guard. "Tell me, is this 'Obaba' the wife of your leader?"

The guard shrugged. "Akshilly, she's more ovva leader 'erself. Oi mean ta soi, ah, she's on the caoncil. Tha's all Oi know. Oi wuz jus' toald ta bring yah to 'er." The guard went back to walking them up the mountain. "Well, 'ere yew ah. The cort of 'er Graice Obaba. Moind yew doan' do annyfink suspishis." The guard shoved them into the room. Quickly, three other guards chained their hands together.

Ivan whispered to Isaac for what seemed like the thousandth time, "Why didn't you use the Gaia Blade to get us out?"

Isaac sighed again. "Well, they took my sword while I was knocked out. When I came to, I was in that dinky cell." He looked at Jenna. "But at least I was with my lover." He laughed at Ivan's face. "What? We can't all be as lucky as I am." Isaac shrugged. "I only wish these chains weren't so tight. I mean, I was lucky to get my shirt back on."

"Silence!" boomed an elderly female voice. "There will be no chattering among the accused." She waited for them to look at her. Mia could see an old wrinkled woman, her hair white with age, wearing long flowing robes. Before them was a fire pit. It crackled with seemingly eternal flames. She nodded to the pit. "You have but one chance to escape fate. You were seen entering the town. You caused earthquakes, ice storms, tornadoes, and columns of flame. Six of our soldiers were killed. What do you have to say to this?"

Jenna stepped forward, dragging Isaac with her. The guard had forgotten to remove their chains. "Madam Obaba, the guards attacked our friend without provocation. We had to go to her aid."

Obaba shook her white hair. "That's as may be, but you still must account for the deaths of the six men." Obaba shook her head. "I also ask of the timing of your visit. Visiting so shortly after an attack by Alhafran pirates? And just after an attack by Laliveran forces, coming from the north? And two of your number are Laliveran, are they not?" Jenna and the others gaped. "You yourself are Laliveran. Who says you weren't a part of the attack?"

Mia stepped forward. "Please, madam. Jenna and Isaac had no part in this attack you speak of."

Obaba turned to look at her. "Young lady of Imil, I am speaking with the Laliverans right now. You will have your chance." She turned back to Jenna and Isaac. "But why does the man not talk? Has he no tongue?"

"Yes, ma'am, I have a tongue. It's just, we never knew of an attack! But... wait... Faran mentioned something about a village called Champa a few months ago..." Isaac bowed his

head. Unless Mia missed her mark, he had just figured out what his friend's father had been talking about.

"Faran? According to my sources, the attack was ordered by one Babi." Isaac's eyes gained a murderous gleam. The mere mention of the "Tolbian Tyrant", as Isaac called him, was enough to send Isaac into the deadliest of rages. "But no matter. If this 'Faran' is behind the attack, we will destroy him." At this, Jenna broke down in tears. "What? Why should we spare this man's life?"

Jenna raised her head. "Faran is a good man. He would not do anything so ghastly without being ordered to." She had neglected to mention that Faran was her father. In Mia's eyes, that was a wise move.

Unfortunately, Ivan was of a different opinion. "Are you sure it's because you don't want to lose your father?" The others told him to shut up, but Obaba silenced them.

"So, this Faran is your father, is he? Now I see why you would defend him." She looked at Ivan. "Valeman, I have only met one other of your kind, a man named Alvin. He is probably as old as I am now, and he was equally bad at keeping secrets. However, all points must be considered. Record-keeper, record that last remark. Record the fact that Jenna is the daughter of this 'Faran.'" He quickly bent over and wrote in the small book.

Isaac was brimming with rage. "Listen, you pompous old fool! If you doubt what Jenna says, then why did you even ask her?" Some of the chains were stretching. "You mentioned Babi. Babi the tyrant. Babi the ignoramus. Babi, whose name is a curse in every Laliveran home! Babi, the one symbol of ultimate evil, is the one you think responsible, but you accuse Faran anyway!" Isaac rushed to the stone

podium, dragging Jenna along with the chains. Isaac was about to attack Obaba when a pair of guards clubbed him on the back of the head. Jenna screamed. Mia struck at one of the guards as she tried to get to Isaac. Ivan just stood there, watching the spectacle unfold with increasing horror on his face. Isaac was now bleeding profusely. Jenna had fainted, and Mia was being forcibly dragged back.

They weren't allowed back out of the dungeon for five days.

(In Tolbi)

As Isaac and co. were being let out of the dungeon for the second time, Felix was leading his group into the city of Tolbi. First, though, he stopped by the gate guard. "Private Shabim! What are you doing sleeping at your post?" The guard jumped up.

"Not sleeping, sir. I was resting, sir. Sir, Lord Iodem wishes to see you, sir. He says it's important, sir. Sir, the lady Gilt is here too, sir." Felix sighed.

"Shabim, don't end every sentence with 'sir.' It's bloody annoying. Am I understood?"

"Yes, sir, General, sir! Oh, and General Felix, sir? You may want to head to the palace first, sir. That's all, sir." Shabim went back to watching the gate. Felix walked off, but Sheba noticed that the man went back to sleep almost immediately after Felix walked off.

Sheba walked up to the palace, dragging Garet behind her. Felix led the way, but he started walking faster when he got to the top level of the palace. About when the others reached the top of the stairs, he was already sprinting away. Then Sheba heard his voice from somewhere down the hall. "Gilt? What are you doing here?"

Then, although it seemed impossible, she heard Hama's voice answer, "What am I doing here? They told me you would be here when I came two days ago!" Felix muttered something.

Out of the corner of her eye, Sheba could see Gareth moving toward a door. From the room on the other side, Felix shouted, "Come on in! There's someone I'd like you to meet!" The others went into the room.

Upon seeing the person lying on the backless couch, Gareth said, "Hama?" She jumped.

"Garet? Is that you? But... but..." She turned around. "Sheba?"

Felix looked at her. "Gilt? Why did they call you 'Hama?' And how do you know them?"

"Well, I, uh, that is, I, uh, um, well..." Her voice was uneasy. Sheba walked up to her.

"So this is where you've been disappearing to all those years." Hama looked embarrassed.

"Uh..." Felix walked over to her.

"Gilt, is what she's saying true? Are you really someone else?" She looked away from them. "Well, I don't care. I still love you." With that, he turned her face toward his and kissed her.

"I was amazed by her true identity as well, General." A tall dark-haired man was standing behind them. "Still, better for our young General to have a wife from the mysterious and distant western land of Contigo than an ordinary handmaid

from one of our taverns. Gives him a sort of prestige, I shouldn't imagine."

"Lord Iodem! I was told you had news for me?" The last was clearly a question. The lord just shook his head.

"I am afraid there is only bad news. Lord Babi, the King, is dead. I asked for Gilt to be sent here when I learned she was back in the city." He shrugged. "I figured you might need someone to comfort you." Felix just stood there.

Hama walked up to him. "Felix? Are you okay?" He just stood, rooted to the spot. Sheba whacked him on the back of the head, but there was no response. Hama looked at her, her eyes almost on the brink of rage. "Try striking him one more time, Sheba, and I would almost regret what I would do to you." With a small "eep," Sheba jumped back behind Gareth. Gareth walked forward.

"Well, there's nothing we can do except move on. Felix, I'm sorry about your loss, but there was nothing you could have done." Felix shook his head.

"You don't understand. Babi was almost like the father I never knew. At least you knew your parents. I don't even remember mine! I have a hard time remembering anything that happened even a few years ago!"

"I suppose now isn't a good time to spring on Felix the fact that he's a Venus Adept..." Sheba shook her head, but Gareth turned to Hama.

"Hama Breeze, it might interest you to know that Felix already knows he's a Venus Adept, and that he was told that by another Venus Adept. A young man named Isaac from Lalivero." Hama looked shocked at this, but Gareth kept on going. "It might also interest you to know that we met Ivan,

and he's intent on lighting the beacons." Sheba was staring at Gareth, too.

"Gareth, have you no respect?" Gareth shrugged, then looked around.

"Say, do you have any idea where Alex is?" Sheba looked around, then asked Gareth what he thought. "Well, I think Alex actually got a room at an inn. He probably didn't want to hear about our reunion with my adoptive sister or about the death of the king."

Felix, meanwhile, was talking with Iodem now. "So what's going on with the rulership? I mean, there's a new King, right?"

Iodem shrugged. "Babi meant for me to be king after he died, and so I took the throne. However, I'm beginning to understand why Babi looked so tired all the time." He shook himself. "Honestly, ruling half of the bloody world isn't easy." He shot a look at Felix. "And the scholar Kraden would like to talk with you, if you have the time. In case you're wondering, the crowning ceremony will be tomorrow at noon. I just hope I can rule as well as Babi did..." Felix patted his old friend's shoulder.

"Don't worry, Iodem. You'll do just fine. Oh, and if you could tell Kraden that I respectfully decline?" Iodem nodded, and Felix heaved a sigh of relief. "Now, if you'll excuse me, I have some other things to take care of." He walked over to Hama and her two friends. "Gilt, er, Hama? Could I talk to you?" She nodded. "Well, you know how I promised I'd marry you the next time I saw you?"

"How could I forget? And yes, I'm expecting you to stay to get married. After all, you gave your oath." Felix bowed his head.

"Actually, the reason I wanted to talk to you is this: I can't get married to you tomorrow. I have to track down a guy named Ivan. Gi-er, Hama-" she put a finger to his lips.

"It's okay. You can call me whatever you want."

"Gilt, I know it may sound like a bad excuse, but I can't take you with me on the road. It's far too dangerous." He hung his head.

"More dangerous than the Third Street Patrol? More dangerous than the men that lurk on Crown Street? It's more dangerous than them?" He shook his head. "Then why not take me with? If I can handle them, I can certainly handle some of the monsters you'd meet."

"It's not that. By the great light of Sol, I'd love to have you with me. I'm just worried about the effect it would have on Gareth and Sheba. See, they've sort of... Fallen in love with the enemy, you could say." Hama gave him a questioning look. "It's what I've gotten used to calling Ivan and his friends. They might have been friends, if we hadn't run into Alex, if Isaac hadn't decided to insult both Babi and myself, or if Ivan hadn't decided to light all the beacons." Hama sighed.

"But you gave your oath. You can't escape that, try as you might. Face the facts, I'll just have to come with." Gareth looked at Felix, then at Hama. He grinned.

"Hey, General! You gonna make my sister cry? 'Cause she nearly bawled her eyes out when she lost Ivan." His grin took on a slightly insane twist. "And it would be unfortunate for you if you made her cry again." He motioned to the pocket of Felix's robes where the ring had been stored.

"Well, loverboy?"

Felix grabbed the little box. "Gilt, will you be my wife?" He opened it, displaying the small ring. It had a golden band, and there were words carefully engraved on it. She took the ring, then held it up to the light, just to make sure it was real.

"Yes, my love. There's just one condition: You have to marry me tonight." She signaled to Iodem, and a small book appeared in his hands. "Iodem can conduct the ceremony." Felix nodded, then took her hand.

The next morning, Hama joined them on their quest. Alex, being who he was, took one look at her and asked what the ring on her finger meant. Felix showed him the ring that he had on and asked, "What? Does it bother you, Alex? Are you... put off by it?" The only response he got was a glare from the Mercury Adept.

"Never mind." He sighed. "I wish Mia was here." Gareth snorted.

"Like she loves you anyway."

"She will. Trust me, she will."

Hama looked at Felix. "Does this happen often?"

Felix rolled his eyes. "Yes, it does. I've been trying to stop it since Mercury Lighthouse."

Gareth and Alex were still arguing. It was Gareth's turn to respond to what Alex had said. "Yeah, maybe when Sol collides with Luna and the stars fall out of the sky." At the confused look, he explained. "It's a line from some poem. The author was angry at his former girlfriend, so he took out his anger at her by writing that she would only be truly

happy when all sorts of impossible stuff happened." Alex goggled at his traveling companion.

"You read poetry?"

"You wanna make something of it?" Gareth motioned with his hand, drawing Alex's attention to the hilt of Gareth's sword.

"Uh, no."

"Good. Now then, let's get going. The sooner we reach Mia, the sooner I can ask her to marry me."

"Pfeh. Like she loves you anyway!"

"Yeah, she does!"

"ENOUGH!!!" Felix looked at Hama with a newfound respect. "Arguing over love is fine, but if you continue to do this, I'll release Felix from his vows and force him to marry this 'Mia.'" That shut both of them up. Felix took his love aside.

"Hama, [A/N: He'd gotten used to that being her name by now] would you really do that?" She shook her head.

"No," she whispered, "but if they think I will, they'll shut up. It's that simple." Felix breathed a sigh of relief. "Besides, you're mine, General. Mine, and mine alone." Felix laughed aloud. He wondered if Ivan's group had this kind of trouble. He decided they didn't.

{They couldn't. They're too nice to each other. They're always so polite, and kind, and I couldn't see any of them arguing over love. Then again, whenever I look at Gareth, the last thing I can picture him being is in love, and he is.}
Hama stood at his side.

"Appearances can be deceiving." Felix nearly jumped in shock. "What, did I forget? I'm a Jupiter Adept like Sheba." At his confused look, she added, "That means I can read minds." Felix jumped out of his skin when he heard this.

Freek: Well, that's nice. Unfortunately, it's also impractical, but... whatever. ^ _ ^

RM: Why do you have to make those little symbols?

Freek: -_? You mean these symbols? They're just something I can do, that's all.

RM: Whatever. Say, when's Rand getting back?

Freek: ... Probably close to Venus Lighthouse.

RM: Okay. Fine. Bring back the evil-

Freek: He ain't evil. Rand's just... Sort of odd.

RM: Riiight. Just like you aren't insane, just a bit aggressive and secretive.

Freek: Oh shut up. Anyway, in case anyone's wondering, here's the accent list: Champa- British, Prox- German, Imil- Russian

RM: Nobody really cares, I think...

Freek: Well, I don't give a damn. Let them read that and think I'm a cocky fool. And an incompetent ignoramus.

RM: Big words...

Freek: Enough! Just Review, please!

***Chapter 11*: The Trial, Take Two**

8BTFreek: I'll open with the review responses so I don't forget them.

REVIEW RESPONSES:

Pureauthor: Well, it's a Cockney Accent, or at least as good of one as I can write. I can speak it much better. The transliteration was killing me. Thanks for liking it. The Champa incident, too. I thought it was quite good myself, all truth be told. And, er... Thanks for the "New Character" comment. That boosted my ego. If I even have one.

A Christian Loser: The "no-battle" thing? Huh? Could you clarify, please? Anyway, you've got it wrong. We aren't all losers; we're just all insane. Some people more than others.

tigerlily: Hello! Thank you for reviewing. And yes, AU is different. It's always different. Thanks for calling it "good", though.

EchoKazul: Well, don't worry about it. Sometimes I'm like that too. And hey! It's not like I'm actually updating quickly! Far from it! It's been (Checks calendar) over a week since my last update! So don't worry. Just chill. And thanks for liking the fic.

END RESPONSES

Freek: Well, another chapter. And I waited a whole three weeks or so. ANY-way... On with chapter 11.

RM: Say, Freek?

Freek: What, o pestilence?

RM: Where's Rand?

Freek: Beats the hell outta me.

(On the Vogon Constructor Fleet Ship)

Rand: And that's for writing some of the most awful crap I've ever heard! *Lets Fire Sword disappear from his hands*

Prostetnic Vogon Jeltz: Well, if you didn't like it, you didn't have to disagree so hard... Ow...

Rand: Serves you right. And if you even think about throwing me out the escape hatch like you did to Ford and Arthur... You're lucky they survived... So just drop me off near Betelgeuse, and I'll call it even.

Jeltz: Deal.

(In The FreekLair (c))

Freek: Well, he can't get in to too much trouble. I mean, it's not like he ran into the Vogons or anything.

RM: Right. Well, let's get the disclaimer out of the way.

Alex: I'll do it. Freek doesn't own Golden Sun, nor does he own the power of Alchemy. But with this power, I'll finally make Mia love me! MWAHAHAHAHA!

Freek: Do that and die, bud. On with the fic! Oh, just a note: The trial scene will take a while. At least, it'll be until I can figure out just what to do with the Proxans. I mean, how exactly do I work them back into the fic? They need to end up... I've said too much.

****Chapter 11: The Trial, Take Two****

Isaac winced as he touched the back of his head. He was now chained tighter, and he had been held in a separate cell. As the guard removed the outer chain, he calmly asked why his head still hurt. "Well, et's not really moi plaice ter say, but yew did go a li'l 'ard on Obaba. And, erm... yeh moigh' wan' ter act koindah. Oi means ter say... Et coodn' 'urt. Jist be yersilf an' things moight go jist peachy!" He smiled as he undid the outer chain. After unlocking the manacles and leg braces, he pulled Isaac up the stairs to the courtroom. "Why Oi 'as t'be th' one tah unchain yeh... The bloody insane one... Well, 'ere yew ah. 'Ave fun, li'l crazy man!" The guard shoved him into the room. Once again, Isaac was chained up. However, the others were there too. He was led over to them.

"Mia, what in the great halls is going on?" Isaac whispered under his breath.

"Well, you attacked the judge about five days ago, so they put you in a separate cell. We're here so that the trial can get started again." He looked and saw that the other three were chained to the bench. He looked down at the mass of iron holding him in place.

"Well, this is uncomfortable." {If only I could just break this chain, I could get out. If only it weren't so hard... Or if it weren't iron...} Obaba looked down at him.

"Well, if it isn't the last of the accused. Mister Laliveran, would you please state your full name for the court?" She looked expectantly at him.

"Isaac Flint, son of Kyle, son of Alexis. Master of the arts of Healing and Combat. Youngest of the Great Western Venus Clan." The other Adepts gasped at that last bit. He had

expected that. What he hadn't expected was Obaba's piercing gaze.

"In that case, would you please turn over your clan's guardian? I cannot permit you to be armed in this courtroom." Isaac looked at her in horror.

"Wh-what?"

"You heard me. Turn over the Djinni. If there are any other Djinn in the possession of you or your comrades, then turn them over as well."

Isaac nodded glumly. "Flint, standby." From nearby, he heard Mia's voice. "Hail, standby." Then came the biggest shock of all. He then heard Ivan say, "Breeze, standby." A small Djinni appeared at the feet of his friends. The Djinn looked up at the prisoners.

"Let me guess. We have to leave because you are in a court, and anything that could be used as a weapon must be turned over." Flint sighed, then dragged the two other Djinn off to the side of the room. "If you need us, we'll be over here. And Isaac, if you try anything foolish... Consider that a warning."

"Now then, Isaac Flint, I wish for you to approach the bench." She motioned to two guards, who undid his feet and hands from the iron prison of the chains. He approached the raised seat. "Do you understand your punishment?" He nodded. "Then you do not protest it?"

Isaac shook his head. "I protest it, but I know I can do nothing against it. My fate is yours, for now. The same is true of the fates of my friends. But I warn you. We of the Venus Clan have never taken defeat easily. There has been only one defeat in the past centuries, and that was when our

enemy had us bound and captured in our sleep." He bowed to the bench. "I suppose this is something similar. I congratulate you on this minor victory. It must be easy to sneak up on someone who appears alone. Someone that just wanted to see the city. It's easy to sneak up on a woman, but you needed guards? That is shameful, Obaba of the Champa." She slapped him.

"Then you protest the accusations? Face your accusers, Laliveran pig." She pointed to a room off to the side. "Face the ones who accuse you of this crime." He got up and entered the room. Inside were six black boxes. Slowly, he opened the lid of one, and gasped. In the box was a dead man in a guard's uniform. He had burn marks over parts of his body, but there were also signs of freezing. In another box, a young man lay, crushed by something that could only be a boulder. A third was there, but the funeral was a mere detail. He had already been cremated. The others were also dead by various combinations of the Psynergies they'd used to defend themselves. "Re-enter the courtroom, Master Flint." He slowly trudged back into the room. "Now do you understand?" Even though he knew what she wanted to hear, he shook his head. "What? Why not?"

He shook his head again. Mia shouted, "Your Grace, if I might say something?"

She looked at Mia. "Make it quick."

"They attacked me without provocation. I was merely defending myself when I called the others over to help me. Then, they tried to silence me. One went so far as to try to cut out my throat. That was before Jenna burned him into space. After that, another one made to gut me. Isaac got that one with a boulder." Mia stopped. Apparently, she had just realized that she had, if possible, gotten them into

deeper shit than they were already in. "Oh, damn." Ivan looked at her.

"Mia, did you really have to do that?" He turned to the Judge. "Madam, please disregard what my friend said. She is still getting over the shock of being arrested."

"What? Disregard her remarks as if they were uttered by someone insane? I cannot do that. She clearly knew what she was saying." Obaba nodded to the Record-Keeper. "Anyway, I ask for some reason, Master Flint. Why should you be allowed to walk free?"

Isaac looked her in the eye. "Three reasons. One, you hold myself and Jenna responsible for an attack ordered by the Tolbian Tyrant. Two, you ignore the circumstances of the deaths of the guards. And three..." He thought for a while. "Three, you seem to have no real care for justice, just revenge." He settled back into the seat, a stone look on his face. Jenna leapt up. Some of the makeshift woodwork broke. She carried it with her.

"Madam Obaba, why do you hold us in separate cells? Why do you keep us from each other's company? Must you be so cruel?" She looked up at the hard face. The stone features made her angry. "If you will not listen, then maybe it is as Isaac said. Maybe you are a pompous fool that will not listen to the truth. Maybe..." She hesitated. "Maybe you need the truth to be beaten into you." She rushed the bench.

"Jenna, NO!" Isaac yelled. He howled like a beast, then grabbed the nearest chair. Quickly, he hurled it at three guards that were attempting to stop her. Ivan grabbed his chair, and was fighting off guards. Mia had also taken off toward the bench, but she was trying to keep Jenna from getting killed. "Jenna, get away from there! Do you want to

end up like me? Chained like a performing animal?" She paid no attention.

"An animal?" Obaba had heard him. "Nonsense. You are a high-security prisoner. If an animal were to be chained as you are, then there would be a public outrage. No, you are not being treated like an animal, however much you may act like one." She sighed, then watched as Mia dragged Jenna backwards. "And as for you, little girl... You will be put in another cell as punishment. Bring forth some chains. I want her bound and put in a cell until she's civilized. As for the young man..." She looked at Isaac, her expression becoming more fearful. And with good reason. After all, he had attacked her. "Place him back in the cell, but with half the chains. Keep the manacles, though. He's still too dangerous to wander without them. They are to be held until tomorrow. The trial will continue then. Oh, and please set someone to tell me when Briggs comes." She stood up, then walked off. Jenna was being dragged away by the guards, two of them clapping chains around her arms and legs. Isaac simply stood, muttering to himself.

"You stupid, stupid fool. Jenna, why did you do that?"

(In the Suhalla Desert)

"And so they said that they were set upon by these beasts in the tornadoes. I'm still not sure what to make of it, but it sounds bad." Felix sat down. "These were some of Tolbi's finest, and they were cut down by some sandstorms." Alex walked over to him.

"And you say that you trust them." He spat with disgust. "If your men can't even handle sandstorms, then I would doubt their power." The point of Felix's sword stroked his chin.

"You were saying? I wasn't finished. Anyway, they said that the storms were being caused by giant lizards, and that the lizards weren't exactly friendly. In fact, they seemed a little hungry. So I'd suggest we watch our backs, or we'll end up Lizard Chow. Got it, little Al?" He smirked, then walked off to see how the others were doing.

Just then, a whirlwind sprang up ahead of the group. "It's one of those monsters," said Felix. "According to the men, you need to pour tons of water on it." Hama shook her head.

"Wouldn't it be easier to do this?" She raised a hand. "Halt," she shouted. The lizard flashed blue-green, slowed for a moment, then sped back up. "Well, that was a waste of Psynergy." She motioned to Alex.

"Fine, little miss. Or should I say Mrs. General?" Her murderous glare shut him up. "Douse," he muttered. A rain cloud appeared over the whirlwind, and water poured into it. The tornado slowed, and the lizard shook off the water. Angrily, it turned on them. "Oh, bloody hell. We're in trouble now, aren't we, General?" Felix didn't look. Instead, he concentrated.

{Okay, this big thing looks like it could easily get out of one of the standard traps, so let's try something as big as it is.} An image of the earth rending open underneath the lizard popped into his mind. Something like that "Isaac" kid had used back at Mercury Lighthouse. He concentrated on the image.

The ground beneath the Lizard opened up, and rocks came crashing upward to meet the mighty beast. It crashed into the ground. Garet walked over and split the creature's head open with his Giant Axe. A slight roar came from the strange beast before it disappeared in a cloud of smoke. Hama stood

in the background. "Are you alright?" she asked, before forcing each of them to sit down and rest up. Sheba looked at Gareth's leg. Apparently, it had been crushed by the falling lizard, and it was bleeding rather badly. Quickly, she grabbed some herbs from her pack, then placed them on the wound. Gareth smiled feebly. A short distance away, Alex was looking out on the desert.

(Near the Exit of the Desert)

Sheba and Hama spent most of the time clearing dust away. Clearly, they were nearing the heart of the sandstorm, but there was something else there. Quickly, Hama cast Reveal.

Alex gasped. There, at the center of the sandstorm, was a gigantic lizard. The thing looked at them. It was obviously very hungry.

Freek: Well, that about wraps up that. I know I didn't include much, but the next chapter's got the Storm Lizard, and that's just oodles of fun for the whole family!

RM: You'll have to pardon him. He's gone temporarily insane.

Freek: No, I'm just always like this. Well, except for the "Fun for the whole Family" bit. That was insane. Anyway, there's still time to review! See the little button, click the little button, type in the little box, click the other little button, and PRESTO! I get happy. So please review. They included that for a reason.

RM: And if you don't, he'll send Alex after you.

Freek: Please, RM, don't be so specific. I'll just send a random FF member!

RM: That's even worse. Please review.

Freek: Yes, please!

***Chapter 12*: Glory, Honor, and Justice**

8BTFreek: All right, I know I've taken a while, but it's because of that stupid one-shot. I couldn't think of how to get it started, and I had to break form and change some of the lyrics so that it would fit the context. Not that that's mattered all that much to me before, but...

RM: ENOUGH! Just get on with it!

Freek: Sure. Anyway, here's the responses to my reviewers!

Reviewer Responses:

EchoKazul: Not the Scrunchy! Anything but the Scrunchy! AAAHHH! I'm writing, I'm writing! *clack, clack, clack, clack* See?! I just had to wait for the inspiration to strike!

ACL: Huh. Well, good luck with the whole penname change thing. Though I must admit, I liked "The Rain Child" better. And "interesting..." I've heard this fic called "kawaii", and "good," but "interesting..." *Smile spreads slowly across face, steeples fingers, leans back on chair* Excellent.

tigerlily: Hroom. Yeah, the accent did take a while to create. And it's coming back. As for the update soon bit... That's going to be tough with my new policy.

Allexandra: Hello again! Great news about your computer. I have to use the one in the basement... *shudders* Anyway, thank you for liking the Felix/Hama (I may have been wrong about the name of that again-I'm changing my bio to say "Dustshipping" for that 'cause the name's just too cool...),

and please don't poke. Don't worry, I'll pass the message on to Rand when he gets back.

End Responses

Nynaeve: FREEK!!!

Freek: Yes, Aes Sedai?

Nynaeve: Where is Rand, and why haven't you been updating?

(Mars Lighthouse)

Rand: So, you're the Wise One Alex talked about.

Wise One: Yes, that's me. But who's this "Alex?"

Rand: Well, Alex's just zis guy, ja know?

Wise One: Stop playing Gag Halfrunt and tell me. *Glow ominously*

Rand: Look! Someone's coming! *Travels out*

Wise One: *Sees Agatio and Karst with Mars Star* Hm. Maybe now I can stop Alchemy from being released. Well, back to the old grind.

(In the FreekLair (c))

Freek: I have no clue where Rand is, and I haven't been updating because of my new policy. It's in my bio, if you'd like to check.

Nynaeve: No, that's fine. Anyway, here's the disclaimer: 8BTFreek does not own, has never owned, nor will ever own, Golden Sun. He does, however, own his story, his version of

AU, the rights to membership of FoGS, and the ability to dig up trivia.

Freek: Ya damn right! On with the fic!

****Chapter 12: Glory, Honor, and Justice****

(In the Desert)

The Lizard looked at them with what could only be described as a hungry grin on its face. Gareth gaped at the tall beast. Before he could act, Alex cried "Waterspout!" A jet of water shot under the tall beast, and it crashed to the ground. Getting up, it grinned before launching itself at Hama. She tried to dodge, but the beast ended up scratching her leg.

Felix stood, concentrating. Suddenly, a gigantic rift opened in the ground beneath the lizard. Hundreds of small rocks flew out before a boulder hurtled into the monster's stomach and sent it flying. The beast landed again, only to be spun in a whirlwind by some quick casting by Sheba. Gareth said nothing, but he gripped the hilt of his axe tighter. Finally, he could bear it no longer. "Inferno!" he shouted, launching hundreds of fireballs into the air. All of them crashed down on the Lizard, which let out a shriek of pain. It swiped at Gareth, but he ducked just in time. It spun around, blowing up even more dust.

"Sonic Slash!" yelled Hama. Purple blades spun through the air. They came into contact with the thing before disappearing. Felix concentrated again.

{Just a little harder. I just have to focus more...} Vines sprung up around the creature. The earth bucked under it. Gigantic spears of rock crashed down on its skull. Several large boulders ripped out of a chasm in the earth. It all targeted the lizard. As the dust cleared, the lizard's body lay

trampled in the dust. In a puff of smoke, it vanished. Felix wiped his gloves on his shirt. "Well, that was easy enough, eh? Is anyone hurt too horribly?" Hama shook her head, but it was obvious that she was in pain. He motioned to Alex, who cast Ply on the injured Jupiter Adept. "Now then, is everyone else alright?"

"Yeah, General. We're just drained." They appeared tired. Garet was leaning on his axe, using it as a cane; Sheba looked like she would collapse if it weren't for her staff. As for Alex... Felix didn't know where that one got his strength from. He shook his head. "We'll camp out in the Suhalla Pass. After that, we make for the Lighthouse." The others nodded in agreement. "It's settled, then. We'll head for Suhalla Pass, rest for the night, and then continue to Venus Lighthouse. We'll beat them there, meet them at the top, and force them to give us the Elemental Stars."

(Venus Lighthouse)

Felix stared at the entrance. It didn't want to open. Upon further notice, he saw a sign etched on the door. The sign read, "None are to enter Venus Lighthouse without the permission of the Venus Clan of the West. By order of Kyle, son of Alexis, son of Isaac, Patriarch of the Venus Clan of the West."

Alex was there, too. "Damn. We manage to make it to the lighthouse, and they pull a fast one on us. The Venus Clan of the West has been dead for years. This 'Kyle' was probably the last of the line. There's no way anyone could break through the door without a battering ram or something." Alex's mind was focused on war and sieges for some reason. "If only we could gather about ten or twenty villagers. There's bound to be a strong enough tree around here."

Hama was near the door, too. "Or we could use the Ki orb that you got in Fuchin Temple. You know-that thing you go on and on about." Felix shook his head.

"This is different. I have a feeling these people are alive. We should try Lalivero. Maybe they have some answers. The three trudged back to Garet and Sheba, both of whom were at the base of the lighthouse, talking with each other about the ones they loved. There would be a trek to Lalivero in their future.

(Champa)

Isaac stood in his manacles. Mia knew they were hard to wear - in the last few days, even she and Ivan had been placed in separate cells for being "too hard on the judge." The little runt was now standing next to her, asking questions. His curiosity was driving her insane. "Madam Obaba, we wish to go free."

"Nothing doing, Madam Hail. You will just have to wait for judgement to be passed." Her gaze turned to Ivan. "And if you do not stop asking questions, Master Breeze, you will be returned to your cell and placed under heavy supervision." His voice halted in mid-word.

{Thank you,} Mia thought. The voice from the bench drifted down again.

"And as for the Laliverans, Master Flint and Madam Arred, you have yet to have judgment placed on you for your other crimes. Master Flint, you are charged guilty for attempted attack on a Judge of the High Court. The penalty: you must face off against our most skilled warrior, Briggs, in a duel when he returns. Madam Arred, you are accused of trying to demolish the courtroom. The penalty is this: You are to clean the courtroom, and you have a fine of seven hundred coins

for repairs. Any fines you cannot pay will be paid for by repossession of items you own." Their heads sank glumly. "And as for all of you, your punishment for murder will be determined by the test. But it can only be performed when Briggs has returned, for reasons I will not state here." Mia hung her head.

"It's been decided," she whispered to Isaac. "They've decided we're guilty of murder without hearing our side of the story." Isaac nodded grimly, then stood up.

"Madam Obaba, I do not flinch from the penalty for attacking you. I earned it. But I protest your decision to call us guilty of the crime of murder when you have not heard our story. Do you deny this?" She shook her head. "What kind of justice is it, when the people are not heard? Is it justice at all, or is it merely revenge? I ask you this, because we are the victims of your arbitrary court. If you do not grant us our say, then you truly are a vicious tyrant, just as I would not have believed." The logic of his argument echoed through the courtroom. She shook her head.

"It is not merely that. There are six dead, and the families call for punishment. This cannot be ignored. If your father were killed by a Champa sword, would you not cry for vengeance?" Isaac did not nod, but he did not shake his head, either. "Answer me, boy. Or are you afraid that even you, with your high ethics, would still seek blood?" Slowly, Isaac's head rose. He stared Obaba in the eye, her seeking eyes meeting his stone gaze.

"If he were killed in battle, then no. I would not cry if my father fell honorably. But if he were killed in the dead of night, by a knife that slit his throat, like my grandfather, then, then o lady of Champa would I cry for the blood of the enemy. To fall honorably is a grace, and it does the family

good. But to be killed by the foe in the dead of night, while you sleep? This is murder. To attack an unarmed person? That is wrong. And what if you are right in doing so? It is still murder. If you wish to kill us, at least let us die in battle!" Before she could respond, the guard rushed in.

"Yore Graice, sumfin's cum ap!" She stared at the guard.

"And what would that be?" she asked, her voice hard and cold as stone.

"Th' 'oigh an' moighty Lord Juj Briggs 'as returned." At that moment, the door swung open.

Freek: Well, that's a wrap!

Nynaeve: With the story?

Freek: No, with the chapter, idiot! The chapter's all finished!

Nynaeve: Oh. Say, when are you going to get the next chapter finished?

Freek: Uh, I haven't begun writing it yet.

Nynaeve: Really? Well, you'd better get to writing it, or I might just have to yank RM from his duties and force him to get you.

Freek: Uh, right! Just as soon as I put this chapter up and get some reviews! So review, or you might get a knock on your door from Nynaeve!

Nynaeve: And I won't be selling cookies.

Freek: Right. Just review, please!

***Chapter 13*: Judgment**

8BTFreek: Well, sorry for the long update time! It's just, I've been concentrating more on my other stuff that I do (like homework, instrument, beating Breath of Fire 2, etc...) but now it's up!

Nynaeve: About time, too!

8BTFreek: I'm not going to respond to that. Anyway, here's chapter 13, the unlucky chapter! But first, here are my reviewers, so that I don't forget you guys!

REVIEWER RESPONSES:

Mesoforte: Thank you for the review. Please don't send Ivan until Rand gets back! Then I'll be glad to accept him!

ACL: Okay, I'll end it this chapter, but there's a price: The whole chapter will focus on Isaac. Other than that... Hope the whole "penname change" thing goes well, as I said. Even though you're not a loser...

Pureauthor: Well, if you noticed, there's a pattern going on. Every clan member has a djinni. I had to use Breeze to get rid of the need to enter Babi's Lighthouse. I will admit that I did take the idea of Djinn being able to be unleashed out of combat from someone else's fic (can't remember whose, though...) but it makes sense. Also, if you mean "Did Isaac plan to give that speech", then the answer is yes. He was trying to figure out a way of making the trial seem unfair to the Champa. If you couldn't tell, it didn't really go so well.

Allexandra: Sorry to Isaac for not understanding the accent! It's just transliteration, and that's been killing me. At least

it's ending. Oh, and you can use him for Hagrid. Free up Hsu to be Oliver Wood.

Kitsune (1 & 3): Thanks for liking it. That's why I write!

Kitsune (2): He's not really that evil; they just got him on a bad day. Piers comes in on chapter... uh... Well, he comes into play right after the lighting of Venus Lighthouse.

Kitsune (4): I'm updating, I'm updating!

END RESPONSES

8BTFreek: Okay, that's enough. Let's just get on with the disclaimer.

Nynaeve: But everyone's hiding, and I don't feel like doing it.

(Hyrule)

Rand: Well, Link, it's been great chatting with you. Hope these hints helped.

Link: No prob. Say, when you coming back?

Rand: Who knows? Gotta go make an author's life living hell. See ya! *Travels out*

Link: I wish I could do that... Oh well. Gotta find that pendant...

(In the FreekLair)

Rand: Well, I'm back! It looks like you're looking for-What the hell?

Nynaeve: *Grabs Rand's ear* Do the disclaimer. Now.

Rand: Yowch! Okay! Freek doesn't own Golden Sun! Now let go of my ear! Freek, when did this devil get here?

8BTFreek: A few days after you left. Now then, on to typing. By the way, Rand.

Rand: What?

8BTFreek: One of my reviewers says she's kind of a fan.

Rand: Cool. Now then, even though I'm your bodyguard, I'll hurt you if you don't start typing. Now move those fingers and get that keyboard working! Now, dammit!

****Chapter 13: Judgment****

(Champa)

A tall, rugged man walked into the courtroom. "This is Briggs?" whispered Ivan. "He looks more like an old salt than a lord to me." Indeed, he looked like he belonged on a ship instead of in a courtroom. His brown hair was long, and he hadn't shaved for a few days. His clothes were wet with sea spray and ripped in more than a few places, but there was a sort of confidence in his stride that only a lord could ever have or maintain. His first reaction upon entering was to frown.

"Grandmother, I thought I revoked your Judge's License. Or is that just a pleasant dream?" Something in his tone suggested that the first one was the more likely.

"The council reinstated it. You cannot remove my license without their permission, you know." Her face held a self-satisfied grin.

"I can do whatever I bloody well please, Grandmother. The council should have no say in Judges' matters. You are out of line. Return your license." He looked around. "And this farce you call a court is finished." Her eyes gleamed. "Oh hell. Oh BLOODY HELL!!" He yelled the last two words. Her smile widened. "There is no way in the deepest bloody pits of Hell you are going to pass that Iris-damned judgment on those innocent young people!" He took two steps toward the bench. "You are in contempt of the law! You, dear Grandmother, are making the Champan Judicial System look like a farce!"

She returned his glare with a look of equal force. "And you, my Grandson, are found in contempt of court." She laughed. "I do things the way I want to. You should have realized that. Besides, none of the other Judges would have taken the case."

"That's because the others are sensible." He frowned. "Have you heard their stories?"

She nodded. "I can get them to regurgitate their contrived excuses if you wish."

"Let them tell me. I will decide their innocence, not you." He looked at her. "Bring one of them forward." Obaba made a small hand gesture, and Mia was brought forward. Briggs turned at the clanking of her chains. "What in Iris's name...? Release her from those chains!" The guards hesitated. "Now, you brainless oafs! Release her and let her speak!" Quickly, they removed the manacles and leg chains. She almost collapsed, but one of the guards rushed to help her stand. "Now then, explain what happened. Why were you chained? Why were you brought here in the first place? What is your purpose in coming here?"

"As I was walking here to find a boat for Idejima," said Mia, "I was jumped by six of your soldiers. They tried to take me captive, but I fought with all my might. I called to my three friends to help me-they have been taken captive over there." She pointed to Isaac and the others. Briggs nodded, then asked her to continue. "Well, we were outnumbered, and now they didn't seem like they wanted to capture us. They wanted us dead, it seemed. Someone tried to kill me, but Isaac and Ivan struck him down. We killed six of the attackers in self-defense, but they were coming in fast, from every direction." She stopped. She couldn't continue.

"Who accused you?" asked Briggs. She said nothing, merely pointing to the side room. He went in. She knew what he would see. Gasps issued from the room, and he stumbled out. "In-in self-defense, you say?" he managed to gasp out, his voice weak.

"Yes, Lord Judge. Self-defense." She was trying to hold back tears.

"Well, it seems you can defend yourselves quite well." He looked toward the others and spotted Isaac and Jenna.

"What? Why are two Laliveran youths sitting in those benches? The Laliverans are our allies, not our enemies!" Obaba motioned for him to approach the bench. After she told him what had happened, he blinked. "But you said these two were not a part of it. Why are they here? Is it because they helped to defend the Imilan Lady?"

"Sir, I am no Lady," came Mia's voice from the back. Briggs kept on going anyway.

"Honestly, I will not stand for this! There will be no judgment passed by you today! Iris help me, you will not get your license back this time! Now Release them!" A grinding

sound was heard. "Uh-oh... Oh, shit." A blue hue passed over the sky before fading. "Well, Grandmother, it looks like you got your way. Just make sure they get their weapons and armor back. And unchain them!" The guards were quick to comply with his orders.

"I guess he's well-respected around here, isn't he?" remarked Ivan.

"Well, he is a lord," said Isaac. The guard handed him back his Gaia Blade. "Um, Lord Briggs, could I have my Djinni back?"

"Yes, Venus Clansman. You will need it if you are to defeat my Grandmother's Salamander." He bowed out of Obaba's way. She raised a small lizard.

"Fire of the earth, Heart of the Forge, Feel my Fury!" She tossed in the lizard, and it was caught in an upward rush of lava. It was engulfed in the flames. The fire spat something out, something large, red, spiketailed, and toothy. It definitely wasn't a little lizard anymore. It roared at them, then charged. Ivan dodged, shouting for Mia to cast some water-based spell.

"Ice Horn!" she yelled. The ice seemed to pierce the lizard's hide, causing it to shriek. It charged, trying to knock Ivan down. He jumped out of the way, but its spiked tail caught him. He was sent flying. Isaac leapt up and struck at it with the Gaia Blade. The blade howled in the rush of air. A giant sword flew down and struck the monster in the back. Its back arched, and it was momentarily stunned. Jenna took advantage of that moment to stick her sword into the beast. She was blown back as the blade howled and released a wall of fire from within the creature. Ivan then struck at the beast, knocking it over into the forge.

"My salamander... You beat my salamander..." Obaba was in shock. "How could it be? Nothing could beat it..." Briggs walked over to the Adepts.

"Well, now that my Grandmother has been convinced, you are free to go. Let me be the first to say I thought you were innocent. Apparently, Grandmother did too, but she was pressured by the families of the dead. Well, good luck on your journey." Isaac waited for a moment, then drew his sword.

"Sir, I was told that for attacking the judge, which I attempted to do, I would be penalized by having to fight you. It was a rightful charge, unlike the charge of murder leveled against us by those families." He bowed. "My name is Isaac, son of Kyle, son of Alexis, youngest of the Great Venus Clan of the West, heir of the family Flint, and master of the arts of Healing and Combat."

Briggs raised his sword. "I am Briggs, Shipmaster of the Champa, Lord High Judge of the Champan Courts, and Heir of the Ankhhol, young master Flint. But I will not duel you today. Any decisions made by my grandmother in the course of this trial are revoked. You are free to go." He made to walk away, but Isaac stopped him.

"If you would please, sir, could you give us a ride to Idejima?" Briggs turned to look at Isaac.

"Master Flint," he said, his voice slow and deliberate, "I cannot take you there. However, I will give you one of my boats to use. May it serve you well." He bowed in a more graceful style, then added, "I expect to see it back."

Isaac nodded, then turned to his companions. "Well, we have a boat. Let's make use of it." He walked down to the docks,

his companions following close behind.

(Idejima)

Isaac docked the boat in a clearing near the caves. The group walked through, Isaac and Jenna remaining silent. They knew the price of being caught now. They weren't going to stop until they'd reached Venus Lighthouse.

8BTFreek: Well, that's that chapter. Next chapter: Felix and the Proxans! Maybe I'll throw Piers in too, just to introduce him. Wait 'til you see what's in store for those guys.

Nynaeve: Well, go and type it up. Or will I have to bring out my powers?

8BTFreek: I'm taking a break for a while.

Nynaeve: Damn. *gasps, runs to wash out mouth*

Rand: Review, or I'll introduce you to my little friends saidin and Callandor.

***Chapter 14*: What Stirs Unseen**

8BTFreek: Okay, it's a brand new chapter. With as little fanfare as possible, I managed to create chapter 14.

Nynaeve: But you got reviews.

8BTFreek: Well then, let's answer them!

REVIEW RESPONSES:

tigerlily: Another interesting! Yay! People are interested! Thanks for liking it.

Mesoforte: Ah, using my own phrase to describe my work. It was really surreal, having someone use my... phrase thingy! And I am the self-titled "King of Plot Twists", but I could always use someone to give me that title...

Zero84: Thanks!

Kitsune: Heh, yeah, they're all coming back. Trust me, I have a special surprise for Alex at the end.

Allexandra: Yes, please use the guard! Unfortunately, he won't be coming back, I'm afraid. We've exited the "Isaac Champa" storyline. However, there will be more unusual places, accents, and people! As for Briggs, he's like I see him-concerned for his people and homeland. That includes their reputation. The Champa have a good reputation, and he doesn't want to make his hometown look bad.

GaretFire: Thank you for reviewing. As for your question, they met atop Mercury Lighthouse.

END RESPONSES

8BTFreek: In addition, I'd like to dedicate this chapter to tigerlily98, my not-quite-loving-but-still-somewhat-kind sister. Because I know she'd go ape if she knew I was planning this.

Nynaeve: Ah, brotherly love. Now then, Rand! Come and do the disclaimer, or I'll box your ears!

Rand: *grumbling* I don't see why I have to do this... Eh, here goes: Freek doesn't own Golden Sun, nor does he own any stock in the fine company that made it. Although he is plugging for a sequel.

8BTFreek: You're right. But, all work and no play makes me bored. So, chapter 14!

****Chapter 14: What Stirs Unseen****

(Lalivero)

Alex stood outside of the building. Diplomatic negotiations weren't his forte, and besides, he had no reason to enter. He was confident of Felix's ability. Hama, Gareth, and Sheba, on the other hand, went in. They didn't think it was safe for him to be in there alone. Well, Hama didn't. Gareth went in to protect his sister, and Sheba... Well, Sheba was Sheba. She was mysterious, and didn't usually give reasons.

Inside the small stone house, Felix was trying to negotiate with the inhabitants. The "Kyle" of the sign wasn't as pliable as Felix had thought. In fact, he was as hard as steel, and had a venomous tongue. {This is going to take a long time.} He turned to Gareth and Sheba. "Hama and I will handle negotiations. You two go exploring." Sheba nodded, concealing a frown. Gareth, on the other hand, stood stiff, saluted mockingly, and slunk out of the room. He

understood what they were going to do, even if Sheba seemingly didn't. Felix wanted him to find the leader, a one "Faran", and get him to force Kyle to grant them access to Venus Lighthouse.

Garet stopped at the tallest adobe house. "This has to be it. Who else would have a bigger house?" Upon further investigation, the suspicion was confirmed (there was a plate on the door that said, "Residence of Faran Arred, Master of Lalivero"). Carefully, they pushed open the door. Inside was a normal looking room, filled with normal looking furniture. Some was ornate, but most was plain. Sitting on one of the tables, looking like it didn't really belong there, was a small silver medallion. Garet spotted it almost immediately. He ran across to the table and picked it up. Engraved on it were runes, but he recognized those immediately. "Sheba," he said, "could you take a look at this?"

She nodded, then cast Reveal. "Aria Forge, b. 12 Mwadib 1077 AGA, parents Jay and Anna, sister Kay, brother Garet." She looked at her friend. "When did you create this?"

Garet looked at Sheba with a look of utmost sincerity. "I didn't! Jeez, you think that somebody had enough time to create a burned silver medallion, place it on this table, and make it my sister's..." He paused, looking at the medallion again. It was silver, and it did appear burned, as though struck by a giant column of flame. He grabbed it, then turned it over. Silently, he pulled out a medallion from around his own neck. "Read this," he said.

"Garet Forge, b. 12 Mwadib 1077 AGA, parents Jay and Anna, sister Kay, sister Aria," she whispered. She looked at the two medallions. Slowly, she turned to face Garet. "Garet,

how did your sister die?" His head bowed down. He sighed, then started to retell the tale.

"When I was just one month old, my sister and I were with Mother, walking to the plaza. Neither of us was displaying much power, but she did have enormous potential. Eventually, something happened on that day, and the potential in her discharged. A column of flame opened up underneath her and launched her into the sky. We didn't know what happened to her. About two years later, Hama rescued me from Vale."

She looked at him. "But what's the significance of finding this medallion? I mean, I know we already found your sister. You fought her on top of Mercury Lighthouse." She looked at him. "Right?" He shook his head. "What? What do you mean, no?"

He sighed. "It's just... I couldn't tell if it was her or not. The not knowing was killing me. Finally, I decided that she might be, but I would never know. But this medal... It explains everything! She had to be my sister, or she wouldn't have been an adept!"

"And what, pray tell, is an adept?" asked a voice behind them. They spun around. Standing in front of them was a gray-haired man. He seemed to have the weight of experience hanging around his shoulders, and the power of rule inside his robe. His face held no humor, but the lines on his face suggested that he would have been laughing under different circumstances.

"An adept is someone with... special abilities," Gareth said, making sure to keep his powers secret from a non-adept. The man nodded. "But that's not why we came here. We're looking for Faran, the Master of Lalivero."

"I am he," announced the man, staring at the two of them. "I heard that General Felix of Tolbi was in the city. Are you he?" Gareth shook his head. "Then I will not waste my harsh words on you. What are you doing in my house?"

"I am here to find you to ask you for permission to enter Venus Lighthouse." Gareth bowed. "But there is something I must ask. Do you have any children?" The man nodded. "A daughter, perhaps?" He nodded again. "Red hair, brown eyes, carries a staff?" Faran nodded again. "And this medallion... did you find it around her neck?" He nodded for a fourth time. "Did she fall from the sky in a column of flame?" Faran nodded, then spoke.

"What is the nature of this questioning? Have you seen my daughter? Or perhaps the kidnapper Isaac? It is said she travels with him. Have you seen them?" His stare bored into Gareth's mind, but he knew Faran was no Jupiter Adept, and so he couldn't read thoughts. Still, the man's stare made him uncomfortable.

"Yes, I have seen my sister and this... Isaac. He seemed kind, though - not the kidnapping sort. Appearances may be deceiving, but he strikes me as an honest fellow." He bowed. "And I suppose I should be thanking you for taking such good care of my sister." Gareth nodded, then took out a piece of parchment. On it, he copied down the runes from the two medallions. On another sheet, he wrote a rune key. After that, he took out a third sheet and translated the two. Faran's puzzled gaze soon turned into a gaze of shock. The third sheet had many words written on it, but the ones that stood out were "Aria Forge" and "Garet Forge." Gareth then pulled off his gloves and held them before Faran's eyes. "And did your daughter have these symbols on the backs of

her hands?" Faran's eyes widened in shock, and he nearly jumped out of his skin.

"Y-yes," he managed to stutter. Gareth stared at him with shock-widened eyes. He blinked.

"Then your daughter, Master Arred, is my sister, Aria Forge. She is also an Adept. I feel I owe you the truth about what an Adept is. The whole truth." Gareth told Faran everything he knew about Adepts. This took several hours, since Gareth knew quite a bit about Mars Adepts. Of course, not all of this time was Gareth explaining Adepts. Part of it was Faran discussing his daughter, as well as Faran's wife coming in and learning the truth about their daughter. Finally, Faran agreed to go see Kyle and Dora, the Healers.

Outside the Healers' house, which was right outside the Sanctum, Felix was standing massaging his ears. Hama was nowhere to be seen. Upon seeing them, Felix bowed. "Faran, Master of Lalivero, I presume. I am General Felix of Tolbi. There is some news which I must convey."

"There are some things I'd like to say to you, too." Faran's eyes narrowed, and a scowl deepened his face.

Felix took a deep breath. "Lord Iodem Passyf, King of Tolbi, wishes to talk with you about the release of the City of Lalivero from Tolbian control." Faran proceeded to ask about Babi. "The Lord Babi of House Ermos is dead. He died not more than a month ago." Looking into Faran's doubting eyes, he said, "I give my word as Captain-General of the Tolbian Army, what I say is the complete truth." He looked inquisitively at the man. "Now then, one of your soldiers said that there was a raid on Champa. What is this about?" Gareth and Sheba excused themselves, and Faran's wife followed

them into the Healers' house. Alex was standing there with Hama and two others. Hama was shouting at the other two.

"How dare you have my husband thrown out by the ears?! I should flay you alive for that!" Her voice cracked like a whip. "And don't try that against me, or I swear I'll-" Her words were cut short by Alex's cry of "Garet!"

Garet walked in. "Hey, sis! What's going on? Who are these people? Have you managed to get us into Venus Lighthouse?"

One of the two, a man with thinning brown hair, walked toward him. "Listen here. If you're with this woman or General Felix, then you're about as close to climbing the lighthouse as I am to flying."

"That can be arranged," muttered Hama. She was eyeing the two with obvious distaste. It seemed that she and Felix hadn't been successful. In fact, seeing Alex there seemed to confirm that they had to resort to the worst-case tactics. Garet walked up to the man.

"Would it be correct for me to assume that you are the father of Isaac, lover of Jenna and opponent of General Felix?" The man proudly nodded his head. "Well... I have some good news and some bad news. The good news is, he's doing fine. I've seen him, and I'd like to compliment the person who trained him. The bad news is, he's trying to light the beacons of the elemental lighthouses. I fought against him atop Mercury Lighthouse. They ended up lighting the beacon and escaping." He looked the man in the eye. "Can I also assume that you are Kyle, son of Alexis, son of Isaac, Head of the Venus Clan of the West?" At these words, the man's head snapped up, as though he had been called by name.

"Yes, I have been called that. Why?" His inquisitive gaze pierced through Gareth's mind, and he seemed to be trying to read Gareth's thoughts. "Is this about the notice? Because if it is, the message still stands."

"Please, hear me out. Isaac is also a member of the Venus Clan, am I right?" He nodded. "Did you believe what I said about your son?" He thought for a moment then nodded.

"He's somewhat rebellious, yes."

"Then do you think he will keep himself from allowing his friends access to the lighthouse?" Kyle's eyes grew wide, and the woman next to him nearly fainted.

"Dora, he's right. We have to let them climb." She shook her head. "Dora, listen! We can't let the lighthouses be lit again! That flash we saw in the north must have been Mercury! Clearly, the Mercury Clan has been defeated. We must allow these people to enter the lighthouse through the sacred ruins, even if it means that we must let General Felix, the Tolbian Tyrant's favorite soldier, run through our sacred place." Slowly, she nodded. "Good. I hoped you'd see it my way. We have to keep the beacon from being lit at all costs." Dora nodded, then looked up.

"You'll need something to eat. I'll pack you travel rations. Chances are you'll run out of food during the journey."

(The Suhalla Mountains)

Agatio frowned. "Elders, they went by here not more than a half-day ago. The tracks are still fresh." His older cousin wasn't satisfied, of course. He walked over and examined the tracks.

"Agatio, really. It's been exactly fifteen hours since they passed here, if they passed here at all. You really need to become better at tracking. No wonder you lost their trail. Now then, let me see." He bent down again, but the other elder's hand pulled him up. "Menardi..."

"Saturos, there's no reason to examine these tracks again. It's obvious they weren't here. They're already at the Lighthouse. We should be going there, too." Menardi dragged Karst over to the rest of the group. "Now then, Karst, explain what you saw." Karst took a deep breath, then nodded.

"I didn't see much, just a boat docked on the Idejima peninsula. I didn't really go to investigate, seeing as how a boat really isn't cause for worry. Then I tried to think of what could be going on, and I went down to look. Left on the ship were telltale signs of Ivan and his little band of followers!" She nodded, out of breath. She usually was better at controlling her voice during battle. Outside of that, she became tired easily. At least she could run.

Saturos nodded. "Okay, so that means they're further ahead than we thought. Let's head off to Venus Lighthouse. They'll be there for sure!" The group continued, but Karst would occasionally try to correct Menardi, or it would be the other way around, and whoever ignored the correction was always wrong, and so it took them a very long time to get through the Suhalla Pass.

(In the Middle of the Eastern Ocean)

The Admiral sailed his small one-man craft on. Storms were approaching on the horizon, but there was a bit of a letup in the west. Quickly, he headed for it. He had to find out why his father had died after leaving for the outside. He had to

know what exactly it was that was so deadly about leaving his homeland. Turning the wheel, Piers set out for the one visible spot of land. A peninsula called "Idejima."

8BTFreek: Well, that's the end of chapter 14!

Nynaeve: Finally. That's longer than any other chapter you've written.

8BTFreek: Only in this story. If you'll kindly remember, chapter 2 of Forms was longer.

Nynaeve: Okay, so it's the SECOND-LONGEST, but not by much.

8BTFreek: Perhaps. But I had a lot to cover. So please review!

Nynaeve: Yes, or I'll make you regret not doing so every waking moment of your life.

***Chapter 15*: The Trials of Earth**

8BTFreek: Chapter 15, more reviews, and a powerful craving for baklava. All signs of too little writing, and too few plot twists. Well, let's see the responses.

REVIEW RESPONSES:

Mesoforte: Thank you. Yes, it was long, wasn't it?

Kitsune: Thanks for the review. Although... there isn't really such a thing as perfection. In fact, I view this more as the product of a warped mind, though it is becoming a cult classic (am I right?)

Allexandra: Aria is also Jenna, in case you haven't guessed. Sorry for ruining it for you if you didn't. Yes, she's the equivalent of Sheba. Yes, Piers is finally here, but he's probably not going to make an appearance this chapter. I have some extremely strange pairings coming up... You have been warned.

ACL: I don't know how you missed a chapter... *shrugs* Oh well. Let's see, there's not much going on right now... It's mainly plot devices and other such nonsense.

GaretFire: Thank you for reviewing... I go write now...

END RESPONSES

Nynaeve: *looks at response to GaretFire* It's official. You are too bored to be allowed to write.

8BTFreek: Don't worry, Nynaeve. I'll have the muses do a review response.

Nynaeve: That's not what I meant!

8BTFreek: Oh well.

Rand: A-hem? *points to 8BTFreek's notebook*

8BTFreek: Where'd you get that?

Rand: Over on the table. Anyway, it's RM's turn to do disclaimer, but he's not here, so it's Gannon's turn, but he's moody, so it's Alex's turn, but he's-

8BTFreek: Who's left?

Rand: It's either you or Sara, but weren't you planning on firing her?

8BTFreek: She and everyone except the FF, RM, and Nynaeve quit.

Rand: Oh. Okay, your turn to do the disclaimer, Freek.

8BTFreek: *rolls eyes, claps hands, makes Megaman appear and do the disclaimer*

Megaman: What the hell? What am I doing here? *Gets notebook shoved in face*

8BTFreek: Read this.

Megaman: Whatever. *reads notebook* 8BTFreek doesn't own Golden Sun. *looks around* Okay, you guys are strange. Where's Wily so I can go kick his ass for the fifth time?

8BTFreek: Outside of this universe. Now then, go! *claps hands, sends Megaman back to his own game* Oh, a word of warning: Venus Lighthouse will take multiple chapters.

****Chapter 15: The Trials of Earth: Venus Lighthouse, Part 1 ****

Isaac tried again to run through the barrier, the result being his electrocution for what seemed to be the hundredth time. Yawning, the others amused themselves by playing with different Psynergies. Ivan had taken to studying the barrier. Then, because of his usual brilliance, he got an idea. "Mia, try using Douse on the floor under the barrier. Jenna, try using Frost right after her. Let's see what happens."

What happened afterward was something that could only be called "dumb luck." The puddle caused by Mia's spell froze into a column of ice... which broke through the line of lightning and deactivated that part of the barrier. "Woah," muttered Jenna. "The barrier's disappearing!" She and Mia tried again on the next one, the result being the same. "Ivan, you've managed to do something right!"

"Well, you'd think I'd get something right, what with how often I've been wrong! It's only probability!" The others didn't pay attention to him, though. They were too busy halting the barrier. Well, Jenna and Mia were halting the barrier. Isaac was busy standing guard.

"Don't let it go to your head. There are still more puzzles in here. Dad took me through to the aerie once. I swear, the lightning barrier was the easiest one." He pulled the Jupiter Adept through and broke the barrier when everyone had passed through. "Got it?"

Ivan nodded. "Right, don't let it go to my head. But still, that was a pretty good idea, wasn't it?" Mia turned around, her eyes flaming.

"If you mention it one more time, not even Iris herself will be able to save your body from the mangling it'll go through at

my hands. Move!" With a small "eep" of fright, Ivan scurried up the stairs-and ran straight into Jenna from behind.

"Sorry," he muttered, quickly sidling around her and running up the rest of the stairs. Standing in the lighthouse proper, he could feel the element of Venus in its pure concentration sapping his strength.

"Good, we're all safe. Now then-" Isaac had just come up the stairs and was going to direct them toward the next room when the dust that covered the walls formed a gigantic purple beast. "Damn it. A golem, right when we're not together enough to fight. Well, let's just get it over with. Ivan! Shoot something at it! Mia, get in back and shoot ice spells. Jenna, launch a dragon fume!" He leapt toward the beast and plunged his sword into its chest cavity. The thing just spat his sword out and left him on the ground.

"Ice missile!" shouted Mia just as Jenna shouted "Dragon Fume!" The two spells hit at once, almost causing the Golem to explode from the inside. A spell from Ivan before it could recover was all that was needed.

Ivan didn't miss his chance. "Destruct ray!" he yelled. The golem was hit head-on. It gave a low whine before crashing to the ground. Dust spread in all directions.

"That's what I meant by traps. We have to get out of here before it reforms itself." Isaac grabbed Jenna and Mia and dragged them from the room. As they passed Ivan, Jenna shot out her sword and caught his robe on it. They entered the next room, a maze of waterfalls. Or rather, sandfalls and moving sand. "Hey, it could be worse. I heard Mars Lighthouse is full of lava, and the winds at Jupiter could blow you right off your feet." Still, it was a daunting maze, and Isaac knew that there would be beasts that would seemingly

come from nowhere: manticores, spiders, orcs, gryphons, more golems. If they were really unlucky, his father might have released one or more of the wyverns to keep intruders out.

(In the Lighthouse Ruins)

"Damn it, Alex, how many combinations are there?" Gareth was pissed off; there was no question. They had managed to survive through harrowing traps and horrible difficulties... only to be stopped by a statue puzzle.

"Well, a hundred and twenty is how many I see." He kicked at the dust. "Shit. A hundred and twenty combinations, and we don't have time to try all of them."

Sheba looked at the statues. "The sun and lighthouses," she murmured. "Hama, what would happen if we put the golden one in the center?"

Hama looked at her. "Well, there would be twenty-four combinations, if we don't look at what the order does to the whole thing."

"So, if the Golden Sun's at the center, which one's Mars?"

"Mars is traditionally red. I know what you're going to ask; here's your answers: Mercury has been blue since probably the dawn of time, and green is most likely Venus. Purple has been reserved for Jupiter, but green isn't too uncommon a color either." Sheba dashed to move the statues at Hama's words.

"Golden sun..." She shoved the gold statue to the center square. "Mercury Lighthouse..." The blue statue was moved to the upper-right square.

"I see," muttered Hama. "Felix, push the green statue to the lower right. Alex, move the red one to the upper-left corner. Garet, I want you to push the purple one to the lower left." At their inaction, she said, "Now, gentlemen, as if it already happened!" Quickly, they pushed the statues to the places she had indicated. The door whirred, then clicked open.

"Dear, you're a genius," Felix said upon hearing the opening door. "How did you figure it out?" She smiled a secretive smile.

"Don't ask me. Ask Sheba. She's the one who got the puzzle for you." He raised an eyebrow. "She figured out that this was the lighthouses. The lighthouses and Mount Aleph. Didn't you read the legends of Alchemy?" He shook his head. "Honestly! I'm not going to explain it to you, you realize. No, you'll have to read it on your own."

Sheba giggled. "Just like Atalanta and Ramses... Teeheehee!" Alex and Garet looked at her strangely, but a strict gaze from Hama forbade her to tell the legends. Not that she would, anyway. {Honestly. The two greatest lovers of all time. King and Queen of the West, if I remember right, but they were arguing and insulting each other constantly. I still don't understand how they could get along long enough to have Megaera...}

{It's because they knew that they loved each other. If you had read the book to the end, you would have seen that. I can see you didn't. Honestly, Sheba, if you're going to quote the legends, you should at least know the entirety of them.} Hama's reprimand was too much.

{I read most of them. I just haven't had time to finish those.} She sighed. {At least I knew the whole legend of

Zagan and Megaera. And you know we've got Ulysses and Zagan right here.}

{Yes, child, I know.} They climbed the stairs after Felix and the others. {Let me guess. You want to know who'll end up getting Mia, don't you?}

{Well... yes.} She walked next to Hama and whispered, "You know, don't you?"

Her response was purely in the mind. {No, only the Doomsayer can tell.}

{Feizhi?! You're not serious, are you, Hama?}

{When I say the only one, I mean the only one.} Her face fell. {Still, it'd be nice to know, wouldn't it?}

"Yes," said Sheba aloud, causing heads to turn.

"Judgment's Beard! What is that thing?" Alex's interjection was mainly caused by something extraordinary that was happening. The sand on the floor was forming into a monster.

(Outside the Lighthouse)

"Damn it!" cried Agatio. "The door is locked. We can't get in!"

"Aw hell. You have to screw everything up, don't you, Fury?" Saturos's voice came from the other side of the road, where he was keeping watch. "Hey, someone's trying to land at Idejima."

Karst abandoned her post to look. "Who? What? Where?"

Menardi grimaced, then repeated Saturos's words.
"Someone. Landing. Idejima." She turned to the others.
"Agatio, forget the lighthouse door. It won't open. Karst, if you're not going to go to your post, you might as well look at this. Saturos, we should really investigate." He nodded, shook his head, and led the group off in the direction of Suhalla Pass.

(Off the coast of Idejima)

Piers pulled his ship in. There would honestly be no way for him to survive the storms with only one crewmember. He needed others to help with making the boat shipshape. His mother had warned him not to go, but he had disobeyed in haste. {Haste is unbecoming of a Lemurian,} his father's voice explained. His father had left Lemuria a few years ago, and never returned. He was going to find out why.

8BTFreek: Well, that's a wrap for chapter 15: Trials of Earth!

Rand: Okay, I can understand the Venus Lighthouse bit, but what's with the Piers and Proxans if they're not getting in? In fact, isn't Piers clueless to the whole situation?

8BTFreek: Yes, but this is all plot development. Sorry for making the Piers bits so short, but there's really nothing to explain. He's just docking his boat.

***Chapter 16*: The Beasts of Earth**

8BTFreek: Well, you asked for it, you got it! Chapter 16! Let's see the reviews.

REVIEW RESPONSES:

Mesoforte: Well, they just want to get in, out, and on their way. Like in the Visa commercials.

ACL: That's good. Thanks for the review.

Allexandra: Don't worry, I've got enough muses. If I ever need one, I'll just grab someone from outside.

Kitsune: Yeah, I am right, aren't I? Weird...

END RESPONSES

8BTFreek: Well, work, work, work!

Nynaeve: And if Freek thinks he owns Golden Sun, then I'm a sweet-tempered simpering china doll.

8BTFreek: *Starts typing out of fear of the thought*

****Chapter 16: The Beasts of Earth: Venus Lighthouse, Part 2****

(Idejima)

The four Proxans had gone in search of the man who had rented the boat. They had separated, each going in a different direction. Karst had leapt at the chance to be away from Agatio. She doubted he thought. Custom said that the Kommandant and the Generalissimo had to marry, but she

was planning on resigning to keep away from that - if she could. The trouble was, nobody left the army. Nobody. The only ways to leave were old age and death, and neither was appealing (one was impossible for her at this time.) Sighing, she turned toward the harbor. That's when she saw him.

He was a relatively good-looking man, shoulder-length blue hair waving in a crisp sea breeze. His clothes were wet with spray, but only if you defined "wet" as "barely damp." He had a strong build, and it was obvious he was of high rank. She walked over to him. "Hello," she said. A simple thing, but it would do in a pinch.

He looked at her. His eyes widened. "Oh, hello. My name is Piers Hydros. And you are...?"

"The name is Karst Tsyndar. Where are you bound, Piers?" {He looks nice.} She mentally slapped herself. {You do not think thoughts like that. Despite what you may want, you are engaged to Agatio, and not even Iris could break that custom.} Still, the name was familiar; she just couldn't figure out why. Just then, Saturos and Menardi ran there, chased by Agatio. The boy had been running hard. The elder Proxans stared at the young man.

"Ah, Picard Hydros of Lemuria. We were waiting for you to visit. Why have you not come?" Something clicked in Karst's mind just as he answered.

"King Picard was my father. Have you any knowledge where he disappeared to?" Piers crossed his arms and tapped his foot.

"My apologies, Piers. I thought you were your father. You do look like the one portrait of him that escaped Lemuria." He flinched. "Come, we'll tell you what we know of your father's fate." They grimaced as they led him off.

(Venus Lighthouse, Left Shaft)

"So both shafts work?" asked Ivan.

"Yes, Ivan, but if memory serves me right, the left is the quicker route. And as I said, the sooner we get through with this, the sooner we can get our boat from Idejima's dock and leave for Hesperia. I think that's where Jupiter is, anyway." Isaac studied the stones. Hesitantly, he pushed one onto the gray button. The stone was launched into the air and hit just behind Isaac, nearly smashing Ivan's toes. "So it's the other one," he murmured.

Mia grabbed the other statue and shoved it next to the button. "Jenna, help me lift this thing." Jenna raced over to the other side and helped lift. Carefully, they placed the stone on the button. This one also sprang into the air, landing right behind Mia. "Is there a third stone here?"

"No," said Isaac. "There's no third stone. Perhaps I remembered wrong." He paced around the room. Jenna, however, studied the stones and the buttons.

"Isaac, I've got it. What we need to do is push both on at the same time." She grabbed Mia's arm and forced her to help drag the block. Shrugging, Isaac and Ivan grabbed the other block and pushed it onto the button. As soon as both were on, something clicked under the floor, and the door opened. However, the next room looked to be a nightmare.

Another Golem lurked in the doorway. Behind it stood what Mia could only describe as a silver-scaled flying lizard. There was something else in the doorway; it had a man's head, a lion's body, and a scorpion tail. "Damn," she muttered. {What the hell are those things?}

Isaac also stared, but his gaze was full of fear. "Oh, shit. Wyvern. Manticore. Golem. Not good. Not good at all." He backed up a few paces. "Damn it all to hell. Why in Iris's name does it have to end like this? I haven't led a full life like my father." He continued to back up. "Wyvern... Weak against... Jupiter! That's it! Ivan, fire everything you've got at the silver dragon thing!" Ivan's face was white, though, and he was stammering.

"Damn it, Ivan, snap out of it!" cried Mia. This one time, she would have given anything to see him as he normally was, even if it was just trying to Mind Read Isaac to see what he was thinking about Jenna. But from the Jupiter Adept... Silence. Fear. Finally, Mia did the one thing she never thought she'd do: She scooped him up in her arms and began to try to get him comforted. She patted his head, stroked his hair, and murmured comforting words in his ear. Slowly, he began to come back to reality. "Don't worry, Ivan. We won't let you die. Now go and kick the dragon-thing's ass!" She shoved him from her arms. This time, he stood there confidently.

"Destruct ray!" he howled. Spears of light jammed themselves in the thing's body. "Tempest! Shine Plasma! Destruct Ray! Tempest! Tempest!" Storms raged. Thunder clapped. Lightning spiraled. The thing just kept coming, though. Finally, Ivan collapsed. He was drained. Mia looked at the giant beast. It was flapping its wings limply. Then, she realized: {The thing's on its last legs.} She struck out in desperation. Her staff caught it square in the chest. A howl was all it gave before collapsing on the ground.

"Thanks, Mia," muttered Isaac. "Now then, could you take on the manticore? I'll handle the Golem with Jenna." He motioned to his... girlfriend... and took off toward the Golem. That left the man-lion-scorpion thing.

"Damn it all. Damn it all." She stepped backwards and cried, "Glacier! Ice Missile! Glacier again! And a third time! And a fourth!" Spell after spell flung from her fingers, but the beast shrugged them off easily. Her eyes grew wide with fear. She backed up. Suddenly, a sword appeared in the thing's back.

"And a nice, swift sword stroke to finish you off, you cretin. Iris's robe, will someone please get this thing off me?" Ivan's voice came from under the manticore. "Hello? Mia? Isaac? Jenna? Sheba? Alex, even! Someone get this Iris-damned thing off of my sword and away from me!" Mia walked slowly over and pushed the manticore's body over. "Thanks, Mia. How can I repay you?" She kicked his side.

"Never mention Alex the idiot to me. Ever. Only say his name if he's attacking us. And even then, try to use 'that guy you hate.'" She walked off toward Isaac and Jenna. Isaac dusted himself off. Evidently, they had won the battle against the Golem. How, though, was another story. One she didn't know the answer to.

"Well, let's get into that room. It's obviously got no more monsters in it; those rooms don't greet you with a battle." He walked inside. "Ah! A rest chamber. Dad said they scattered these through the whole lighthouse. Good thing we've found one now, huh?" With that, he laid down on the smallest bed in the room. There were fifteen beds in the room. Ivan grinned thankfully, and grabbed the closest one. He was tired from all that Psynergy casting, Mia guessed. She herself grabbed one across the room, and Jenna took the one next to hers. Slowly, Mia fell asleep.

(Venus Lighthouse, Right Shaft)

Felix stared at the complex pattern on the floor, the holes, the large stones, and the statue. He shook his head. Even

though that "Kyle" person had said the route was faster on the right side, he did say that there were tough puzzles. This proved him right. "A damn shame, too. Sheba, can you make heads or tails of this?" The young girl shook her head.

Hama stared at the floor. "So that's how it works," she murmured. "Felix," she said in an audible voice, "what's the floor pattern make you think of?" He shrugged. "Try rolling a marble." He stepped back, one eyebrow raised. "It's a track for something to run through, but it's broken. I'd bet if you pushed those stones into the right holes, it'd unlock the door."

Sheba's face lit up. "I see," she murmured. "Alex, Gareth, move the stones so that it looks like a track. Now, or there'll be hell to pay." The two jumped at her quietly spoken words as if she'd shouted at them. Gareth in particular moved quickly.

"So if I do this quickly, I'll see Mia again soon?" Sheba nodded, and Gareth's energy doubled. Alex's, however, remained the same. Not that he wasn't doing much work; he just wasn't trying as hard as Gareth was. He seemed to think that he had a natural right to marry Mia (this really got both Sheba and Gareth's gall flowing), he thought that she would just melt in his arms (and Sheba and Hama resented him for that one.) As soon as Gareth and Alex had dropped the stones into the holes, a beam of light shot along the track from the statue. Something whirred, and the door clicked open. There was nothing to hinder them, but that just meant that the monsters were hidden under the surface.

After entering the next room, all the doors bolted shut. "Things are going very wrong," muttered Felix. The room shook, and the floor slowly opened. Something was rising up from a platform. Something that looked suspiciously like the

Storm Lizard. A Storm Lizard, but this one had wings.
"Damn," mumbled Felix. "Damn it all to hell."

Rand: Say, Nynaeve, I haven't seen Freek since he started writing this chapter.

Nynaeve: Neither have I. Say, let's check the disturbance in his writing room. *the writing-room door opens with a bang, and Freek tumbles out of the room*

8BTFreek: Okay, okay. I'll let you be a muse. Now let me write in peace!!!

6-year-old Girl: Finally you pay attention to me!

8BTFreek: It's called "writer's block."

6-year-old Girl: You know, if I were alive, you'd be arrested for child abuse.

Rand: Uh, Freek, who's the kid?

6-year-old Girl: My name's Eshli. I'm one of his OC's, but I'm in an Original Story of his that he's been forgetting for only God knows how long.

Rand: Uh, right.

8BTFreek: I'll tell you about it later. In the meantime, please review!

Rand: Or I'll organize the FF to bombard your house with TP and eggs. And industrial-strength flamethrowers. Mmm... burned eggs and ash...

Eshli: So review!

***Chapter 17*: The Light of Venus**

8BTFreek: Well, here I am with another installment of the insanity-causing, idea-squelching, gray-shaded AU Cult Classic, "Against My Friends!"

Eshli: But it's not a cult classic. It's just something you've been writing in your free time.

Alex: And while you should be doing homework.

8BTFreek: So? It's my story, I'm proud of it, so there.

RM: Uh, but what's to-

Alex: You're back! You're back from who-knows-where!

RM: "Who-knows-where?" I was outside in the cold, waiting for Freek to let me in. I see his writing hasn't improved...

8BTFreek: *flips off RM*

RM: Ok, that's it! You goin' down, monkey boy! *Jumps to attack Freek*

Rand: I don't think so. *Grabs RM* We've got things to discuss. See ya. *Walks off, RM in tow*

8BTFreek: Well, now that that's taken care of, let's see the reviews!

REVIEW RESPONSES:

Allexandra: Yup, he did. Fortunately, he's not dead. I've got the most inspired plot twist ever coming up, though. Well, other than the plot twist at the end of "Witness For the

Prosecution" (I got a role! WOOT!) As for your question... That'd be telling... But it's going to be revealed in this chapter anyway. Isaac's got a few memory problems about the lighthouses. He didn't pay all that much attention to his father's lectures.

ACL: No prob. You didn't miss a chap. The news about your comp sucks, though. Good thing it got over it.

KA: Well, get your brother to review! Also get him to review Forms, This Was Not Me, Separation... i.e. all my oneshots and my multichap fics!

Mesoforte: I just wanted to show the difficulties that my version of Venus has, including the worst monster you've seen in this fic so far: The Mother Wyvern. Thanks for the review, and for being a constant reviewer.

END RESPONSES

random screams from CharLab

8BTFreek: Dammit, I'm going in there. Eshli, I leave you to type up the chapter.

Eshli: No, I wanna go and fight! You stay here! *looks at Freek with little-girl eyes*

8BTFreek: Damn you, Lazarus Long! Damn you for being right! *lets Eshli go into CharLab* Well, let's see... I don't own Golden Sun.

Gannon: Too true. Now then, type! *threatens with spear*

8BTFreek: Eep! *types like the wind*

****Chapter 17: The Light of Venus: Venus Lighthouse, Part 3****

(Venus Lighthouse, Right Shaft)

Felix stared at the giant beast. It looked remarkably like the Storm Lizard, but it was silver and had a full wingspan that was probably the size of the room. Its teeth dripped a purple liquid, and its eyes gleamed hungrily. "Shit. Kyle told me about this. It's called the 'Mother Wyvern,' and it's supposedly immortal. The only way through the door is to defeat it."

Alex looked at him. "But it's immortal! How do we kill it?"

Felix let out an exasperated grunt. "I said 'defeat', not 'kill!' We just defeat it. Sheba, Hama, I want you two on the offensive. Kyle said it's weak against Jupiter Psynergy. Fire everything you've got at it! Alex, Gareth, attempt to slash its wings. I'll stand back for healing duty, since I'd barely affect it." Hama and Sheba nodded, taking out their staves. Alex and Gareth moved into position, Gareth's swordblade shining brighter than Alex's polished staff.

In unison, Hama and Sheba fired a pair of Destruct Rays. Gareth dodged it, then swung at the wyvern's wing. The Psynergy hit head on, but the beast wasn't fazed. At Gareth's sword stroke, the beast shrugged. The wing wasn't damaged, but Gareth's claymore looked like it had seen better days. "Spark plasma!" yelled Hama. The lizard staggered before coming forward. It let out an unearthly shriek.

Before anyone could see what was going on, a purple wind blew through the room, almost poisoning everyone. Alex almost threw up from the vileness that the wind possessed. Felix quickly whipped out a potion and tossed it to him.

There were precious few, and they were to be used when necessary. He felt it necessary. "Sing, my blade!" It was one of two he'd been given by Babi, its slender edge singing with a hypnotic song. Clouds appeared over the Mother Wyvern's head as the blade howled. It coughed twice before falling asleep. "Strike!" shouted Felix.

Garet hit it with an Inferno, while Alex struck with a Megacool. Hama and Sheba flung spell after spell at the gigantic beast. Finally, it began to stir. It screamed, a scream that could be heard as far away as Lalivero. In the left shaft, Isaac and his friends would pause to see what was going on. In Lalivero, Kyle would sigh with relief. In the right shaft, a miniature earthquake accompanied the scream. The Wyvern Mother fell forward with a scream.

"It's still alive," said Felix. "It's just resting, I can tell. Let's quick get to the other side!" The door had opened while the Wyvern Mother fell. The Adepts raced through the door and up the stairs. Well, the men did. Sheba and Hama were carried up. Felix had Hama over his shoulder, while Garet carried Sheba in his arms. Atop the aerie, they would wait and rest. Atop the aerie, they would greet their enemies.

(Venus Aerie, Five Hours Later)

Isaac and his companions jumped off the little platforms and saw their enemies waiting for them. "Well, this is good," he remarked, sarcasm thick in his voice.

"Just swell," said Ivan, using up the sarcasm he'd been saving since he first discovered that Mia considered him a pervert (about five minutes after she'd said it for the third time.) "Well, can this get any more perfect?"

"You know, you two could try being a little more optimistic," muttered Mia. Then she saw who was atop the aerie. "Or not.

Burning packets of figweed." Ivan shot a curious glance at her. She shrugged. "You'd have to be Imilan to get it."

Jenna stared out at their opposition. "Well, I guess the only thing to do is make it a rush job." She looked at her friends and shrugged. Ivan nodded. Quickly, all four of them jumped onto the aerie.

Felix looked up at the sound of footsteps. Faster than you could say "Jack Robinson," he was at their location. "I don't think you'll be lighting this beacon," he said. The others rushed up behind him. Garet and Alex both moved toward the blue-haired girl, and Sheba made to collide with Ivan, who tossed Isaac a small brown sphere. Felix made to attack Isaac when a rapier got in his way.

"If you're going to attack someone, attack me," came a woman's voice from behind him. He turned to see the young girl Garet had fought atop Mercury Lighthouse. He elbowed her in the stomach and tried to go forward. This didn't turn out to be such a good idea. She tripped him, and he landed on the stone floor of the Aerie. "If you want to keep him from lighting it, you'll have to go through me. Isaac, light the beacon!" She slashed her sword down upon his lying form.

"Hama, stop him!" yelled Felix as he rolled away from the sword's seeking blade. Getting up, he bowed to his opponent. "Felix of Tolbi. You?"

"Jenna Arred. Now let's fight." She swung, an easily parried blow. Unfortunately, she kept pressing him, forcing him to block.

Hama leapt over to where the young Adept stood. "So you're Ivan?" she questioned.

"No, I'm Isaac. Don't mistake me for the shrimp. Listen, I've got a beacon to light, so if you wouldn't mind...?" Her response was a quick thrust with her staff.

It hit right on target. Clutching his stomach, she could tell he was winded. "Ouch! Okay, that's it!" He drew his sword and threw himself at her. Though she managed to parry the first three strokes, the fourth sliced her arm. "Stone Spire!" he shouted. Large rocks came crashing down on Hama's head, and she barely made it out alive. The young Isaac concentrated a little, then swung his sword one-handed in a giant arc. It barely missed her.

"Spark plasma," she muttered. The bolts hit Isaac head-on, causing him severe burn injuries. "Destruct Ray." Light sprayed, and one especially large one hit him square on the chest. He leaned on his swordpoint, muttered a few words, and jumped back into the fray. She was shocked. "How can you do this?" she asked.

"Very simple," he replied. "My name's Isaac Flint; I'm the son and apprentice of the Healers of Lalivero." He ran forward and launched another wave of attacks.

"Mia, I'd like to tell you something." Gareth was the first to arrive in her presence, and he was a little nervous. Alex soon ran in on the two.

"Mia, I've got something to tell you." Gareth turned to him.

"Beat it, hair boy. I was here first." Alex laughed.

"No way, poet freak. My message is more urgent." It was Gareth's turn to laugh.

"In your dreams. Honestly, do you think she really wants to talk to you? I saw the way she looked at you at Mercury. I think she'd like it if you dropped down dead." Mia's mouth dropped, and Alex fumed.

"That's not funny. Those are fighting words." He pulled his staff from its sling on his back.

"Ladies first," said Gareth, a sneer on his face. Alex roared, then threw himself at the young man. Gareth made as if to yawn, then pulled his sword from its sheath and deflected the staff blow. "Come on, you can do better than that," he yawned. Alex's face reddened, and he launched himself at Gareth again. Gareth blocked the staff. "Come on, I'll show you how it's done." He then threw himself at Alex, first sweeping in swift upward movements with his sword, then appearing to swing down. In mid-swing, he dropped to his knee and attempted to slice open Alex's stomach. Instead, he hit a very hard staff.

"Stop it!" yelled Mia's voice. "You're almost as bad as he is," she said. Gareth hung his head from shame. "And don't do that. I know what you wanted. You wanted to see him dead, you wanted to have me all for yourself." His head fell further. Alex puffed up. "You too, you're responsible for him doing this. You interrupted him and insulted him when he said that he had an important message. And he was here first." She forced him to look at her. "Now then, what was your message?"

"Mia, I admired you from afar atop Mercury, and I'd like to get to know the angel I saw up there." He blushed a little. "But now you probably won't want to," he sighed, sinking his

head, "seeing as how I've been a total ass since you got up here..." She pulled up his head again. Alex tried to walk up behind them, but Mia just jabbed her staff in his gut, much like Hama had done to Isaac. He stumbled back, then collapsed, winded from his fight with Gareth and the blow from Mia.

Mia looked into Gareth's eyes. "That sounds like an excellent idea. Don't worry about Alex; he won't bother us. Now then, what do you want to talk about?"

Ivan looked at Sheba with glowing eyes. A little kid's elation flashed in them. "Sheba!" he shouted. She smiled at him. "Sheba, it's me! Remember me?" Without a word, she rushed him, crushing his ribs in a tight hug.

"Ivan! It's been a while. Let's get down off this thing!" She let him go just enough to look in his eyes. His face fell.

"Uh, there's a little problem. The lifts aren't working. We can't get down Venus right now." He looked at her. "But we can get to those stairs. Nobody's using those for fighting." His eyes pleaded. She sighed.

"Fine, we'll talk on the stairs." He jumped for joy as they walked to the stairwell. They began to discuss each other. Ivan was determined to get her to fall for him before they left Venus Lighthouse because... he'd fallen for her the moment he'd laid eyes on her.

(One Hour Later)

According to Kraden's first work, there are several alternate universes - places where things may have turned out differently or will stay the same. However, certain actions

and events will always happen. Chief among these are: The sealing of Alchemy, the Great Alchemy War at the end of the Golden Age, the relighting of the Beacons (for good or ill.)

One such event, though not well known, is Sheba's Fall. In every universe, if the person of Sheba should ever visit Venus Lighthouse, she will fall off of its aerie about fifteen minutes after its lighting. What happens afterward could change, but it is inevitable. Sheba will fall off fifteen minutes after Venus is lit if she's up there.

This is what happened in this universe.

The beacon had caused the lighthouse to split into four sections. On three of the sections, battles raged. A three-way battle between Mia and the two who had fallen for her, a battle between Felix and Jenna, and a continuing skirmish between Isaac and Hama, who had just gotten the hang of battling against an Adept.

On the fourth, they couldn't see Sheba hanging on the edge of the lighthouse. Ivan had extended his hand and was trying to pull her up. "Just hang on a little longer!" he shouted. The heads of the others whipped around to see what was going on.

"I... I can't. Ivan, look down. The lighthouse is collapsing. Even if I do hang on, it'll be worthless. The lighthouse will bring me down." She closed her eyes. Slowly, she let go of his hand. "Good-bye, Ivan," she whispered. "I... loved you..." She slowly fell down the side of the building.

"Sheba! NO!!!!" Not bothering to breathe, Ivan leapt off the side of the side of the lighthouse. Hama's mouth dropped, and she screamed.

"IVAN!!! NO!" She sobbed like a little girl. For the second time in her life, she had lost her only blood relative. And this time, he was never coming back. {Never. Never. Gods, why never? Why? Why?!}

A short distance away, Mia stood, looking at the spot where Ivan had been kneeling. "The little perv had a girlfriend... Why'd he have to die right when he was about to reform?" Gareth was silently sobbing on her right side. Suddenly, his mouth creaked open.

"Sheba... I looked after you, protected you... why couldn't I keep you safe this time?" Alex stood in silence, shooting glares at Gareth that could not be interpreted in any way other than "Oh, for Iris's sake, shut the hell up! She gave her life for our cause, so quit blubbering!" Mia decked Alex and walked up to Gareth. She turned him to face her.

"Gareth, I'm sorry for your loss." She embraced him lightly.

At the touch of her hands, he looked at her. Suddenly, he had wrapped her in a rib-crushing embrace. "Mia, I know that I may seem weak, but..." He loosened his grip a little, and she raised a finger to his lips. He nodded, tears flowing down his face.

"It'll be okay, Gareth. We'll make it through this. Even if fate has forced us to be enemies, we'll always be there for each other." She lightly kissed his cheek as she wondered at the odd nature of their feelings. {To imagine that death could bring two people so close together...} Neither of them noticed Alex fuming. "Gareth, I've been wanting to tell you this for a while. I - I think I love you."

His eyes widened, and a slight smile crossed his face. "I love you, too." This time, he kissed her, but his kiss was on the lips.

(Idejima)

Saturos recognized the tremor, but he didn't say anything. Instead, he grabbed Menardi's arm and made a small motion. She spoke up. "Piers, would you mind if we joined you on your ship?" Of course, the way she asked, it was a command. The Prince of the Lemurian Islands nodded slowly before running for the door. Karst and Agatio got up, too, and they also exited the small inn in the costal town.

The ship was docked just outside, and they were on board and cast off before the really powerful earthquakes struck. A large wave launched the boat into the middle of the Eastern Sea.

After Venus Lighthouse had settled down, Felix had allowed Isaac, Jenna, and Mia to have a head start. They ran off to Idejima, where their boat was docked. There was just one problem.

Their boat wasn't there.

Sighing, they grabbed an Idejiman boat and sailed off to get through to Hesperia.

(Lalivero)

It was with a heavy heart that Garet walked onto the ship. He had lost the two things he'd fought so hard to keep: Sheba, the girl who he'd sworn to protect from any danger, and Mia, his one true love. Hama wasn't exactly in the best of spirits, either. She'd lost all of her blood relatives, and her apprentice had disappeared. Garet shook his head. {Tomorrow will be a better day. It will.} The words didn't seem true, though. It seemed to be another lie.

8BTFreek: And the author sets down his pen, looking at the finished book. But something's missing, he realizes. There's still another half-book empty, and more loose ends than feels comfortable. Frowning, the author picks up his pen, determined to finish the book.

Eshli: That was a long chapter, and a long farewell note.

8BTFreek: Oh, this story isn't finished! I'm not even going to split it up! I'm keeping it all in one. Now then, let's see... I've got the next five or six chapters mapped out. This will be fun.

Eshli: Are you sure? Your idea of fun is usually considered cruel by most people.

8BTFreek: Do not bother me with trifles, my creation! There will be blood tonight! Besides, I can't end now. If I call this finished, reviewers will be at my throat.

Eshli: Oh. Well, review, or I'll keep Freek from typing the next chapter.

Nynaeve: Eshli, time for bed!

Eshli: Yeah right! Who's gonna make me?

Gannon: I will. *picks up Eshli and slings her over his shoulder, turns to audience* Hello! Review, and I won't be forced to send this little devilette over to your house.

***Chapter 18*: Dragon Attack**

8BTFreek: Hooray! More reviews for my longest-running one!

REVIEW RESPONSES:

Allexandra: Yeah, Eshli... How can I put this? Here we go: Messing with Eshli is like messing with the Death Star. Very few things work against it. Thanks for the review!

Mesoforte: Excuse me? When did I use that phrase other than last chapter? I think it's new for me. Ah well, it's the Aussie/Brit in me coming out. Thanks for reviewing.

ACL: I know it wasn't my fault... I just have computer empathy...

Kitsune: Hm, well, get him to my stage, where the computer is just an extension of his body. Then he'll review. Please, though, get him to at least review one chapter! I'd like that. Besides, after he reviews, he'll want to read more and review more! At least, that's what I've found people do.

END RESPONSES

8BTFreek: Well, the song kick has transferred.

Eshli: Oh no. Oh, God, no! *runs from room screaming*

Mario: Eh, it's my turn. Freed doesn't own Golden Sun or Queen. That's it.

8BTFreek: Although I do own a copy of "the Game"...

****Chapter 18: Dragon Attack****

The first thing Ivan felt upon regaining consciousness was something hard. He was lying down on something hard and, from the feel of it, wooden. The next thing he noticed was that he was wet. Slowly, he opened his eyes. His vision was still dark, but he could make out something on top of him. That's when he noticed that his arms were curled up above him. {You'd think I would have noticed that...} he thought as he tried to sit up. Unfortunately, whatever was on top of him was rather heavy. Kinda warm, too. And soft - almost cottony, but there was something under -

"Sheba," he muttered. So they were both alive. A comforting thought. "Sheba," he muttered, unwrapping his arms from around her. He poked her side. "Sheba," he said in a slightly louder voice.

Sheba sighed at the sound of the voice, not wanting to open her eyes. It had been such a strange dream, too. She had been atop Venus Lighthouse, and Ivan was there with her. She had fallen off, but... He'd said he loved her. She could remember him diving off, too. The voice called a little louder. "Sheba." She didn't open her eyes. "Sheba!" it shouted.

"Just a minute, Felix," she muttered.

"Felix? Where?" Sheba's eyes flew open at that remark. Above her was a blue sky, and she could faintly feel... Was that a sea breeze? She became aware that she was resting on something. She rolled over onto something wooden. Uneasily, she stood. She looked out. "Where are we?"

Someone grunted. She then heard Ivan's voice say, "At sea, as you can see. Unfortunately, there's no way to remedy the situation."

"Apparently," she added, teasing his choice of words. He realized what he'd said and laughed. She looked around the boat. All truth be told, it was more of a ship, but to her it was a boat. This was mainly because anything that sailed was a boat to her. There was a tall pole sticking up from the middle, though, and no oars. A large piece of cloth, soaking wet, hung from the pole. There was a little wheel on the front of the boat, and there was an anchor on board. She turned - and saw Ivan looking at her. As soon as he noticed, he turned away, blushing. "Oh, come on! It's ok. You're not going to have much else to look at until we find land; I'm the best you've got, and it's not a lot." He mumbled something which sounded a lot like "I object, milady" before straightening and looking at her.

"You know," he said, looking around, "this is the ship we were sailing. That means all my stuff should be on here." He walked over to one of the doors and pulled it open. "Ah, yes. This was my cabin. Mia had the one next door, and Isaac and Jenna shared the Captain's cabin." He walked into the small room and removed a small, thin box. Grinning sheepishly, he extended it toward her. Carefully, she took it and opened it. "I looked all over Xian for something like it. I really hope you like it." He turned a little red after that. "Go ahead - open it."

{Well, I'll have to tell him I like it, even if I don't.} Carefully, she removed the long, chest-wide, thin lid. A small gasp escaped her mouth. Inside was a dress - silk, white as winter snow, as beautiful as... Words escaped her. She swallowed.

"D-do you like it?" he asked.

She blinked. Slowly, she said, "Ivan, where... Where did you get the cash to pay for it? I mean, it must've cost an arm and a leg!" He looked down, almost depressed. "It's beautiful,"

she said quickly, "but it's too expensive. I really can't accept it. Save it for someone else."

"But - I made sure it would fit you. I mean, a part of my mind was taking measurements when I last saw you." He dropped back into a defensive pose. "I didn't mean anything by it! I just wanted to get you a unique gift!" She lightly touched his shoulder. He straightened a little. She closed the box and kissed his cheek.

"That was sweet. Next time, though, don't spend so much. I mean, it's ok to get me flowers or chocolates instead of silk." He looked down. She rolled her eyes and sighed.

"Could you at least let me see if it fits you?" She rolled her eyes again, but she nodded.

Walking over to the cabin next to Ivan's, she said, "Don't peek!" and walked inside.

It was like walking into another world. On one wall were paintings - obviously done by Mia - of someone in plate-mail armor with red spiky hair. It was supposed to be Garet, she guessed, but Mia had made him seem like a male version of Iris. And he was always kissing her, or embracing her, or proposing to her. Also in the room was a small book with a little lock - {Mia's diary!} - and a little brass incense-burner. Several other books lined the walls, arranged on little shelves that had obviously been installed by Mia after they had gotten the boat. The diary's key was nowhere to be found; Sheba presumed that Mia carried that little thing with her at all times.

Quickly, she changed into the new dress. She had to admit, it fit very well. Perhaps Ivan had an eye for measurements. Rising, she opened the door. As soon as it had opened, her mouth dropped.

Ivan was standing there, just as before - only, when she'd seen him, he hadn't had on that pair of black shoes, nor had he on the thin shirt and light breeches. {Maybe it's a change of clothes.} He smiled as he saw her, and bowed. She jerked him up. "Oh, stop that! I'm no lady, and you're no serving-boy. We're just two lost and lonely people."

"Who happen to love each other," he added. The distinction seemed important to him. "Would you care to dance?" She shook her head.

"There's no music."

He laughed. "Then we'll think some." She nodded slowly, paused, opened her mouth - and realized that Ivan hadn't said a word with his mouth since changing. A light air began playing in her mind, and Ivan slowly moved toward her. She took his hand lightly and smiled.

It was three days since the dance. They had discovered food on board and rationed it until they found land. Ivan worked the sail, and Sheba held the wheel. The first two days had passed without event. The third day, however, Ivan spotted something. "Land!" he shouted. Indeed, there was land ahead, and they could make out a small town on the coast. Like most towns from a distance, this one appeared to be full of joy, considering the amount of activity visible even from a distance. They sailed up close and anchored off the coast. They walked up the beach to the small town that had seemed so joyous from the distance.

Appearances deceive. The town was near mourning. The largest house was decorated in off-white, but it wasn't joyous like white normally meant. A pair was arguing in front

of the large building. Finally, they began shouting. A woman's voice came through. "-Told you, a hero's going to appear, and he'll save Kushinada! You don't need to do anything!" A man's voice yelled back.

"And I'm telling you, she doesn't have to do this if she doesn't want to! It's not right to force her to stand out here!" Curious, Ivan and Sheba started walking closer.

"Listen," muttered Ivan. Suddenly, the Adepts could hear their words as if they were standing right next to them. A third voice entered the conversation.

"Susa, please listen to Uzume! If she says warriors will appear, they will! Do not fret!" She seemed pleading. The pair walked even closer. The man - Susa? - turned.

"Kushinada," he muttered, "are you sure? I mean, can't there be another way?" They were now close enough to distinguish three figures. One was on the ground. That one - Kushinada, probably - shook its head. "What? But... No! I won't let you die! I'm going to kill the Dragon myself! Then there won't be any need for sacrifice!" He ran off, bowling over the two Adepts. The other standing one - probably Uzume - walked over to them and helped them to their feet.

"Hello, travelers. Welcome to Izumo. I apologize for Susa's behavior - these are bad times, and you probably shouldn't have come." She shook her head. "If it wasn't two days to the new moon, we'd probably be a happier community. Unfortunately-"

Ivan interrupted her. "Sorry, lady... er..."

"Uzume," she said without hesitation.

"Yes, lady Uzume, but what's going on? Why is the town in mourning?" Uzume dropped her head, and a sob escaped from the other woman.

"Every new moon, the Dragon comes. It destroys our village unless we leave out a young woman as a sacrifice. We had to hold a lottery... Kushinada's name was chosen. Susa, my bodyguard, went into a rage after hearing this. I am told he broke many things. He was going to go and kill the Dragon before the new moon. He also wanted Kushinada to swear not to sacrifice herself. She was the only one who could keep him calm. She refused. I only hope he's safe." Kushinada wept silently.

{A tale of sadness,} thought Sheba.

{Yes, it is,} replied Ivan through a mind-link. {We have to do something to help.}

{WHAT?! But we don't know her!} Rage passed through.

{Sheba, listen. If the Dragon lives, it will continue to kill until the village is dead. Would you be able to live with yourself after that?} She shook her head. Ivan sent a mental image of satisfaction, then turned to face Uzume. "Do you know where the Dragon lives?" She nodded and opened her mouth. "Before you object, please, let me explain. My friend and I may be travelers, and we may seem young, but trust us, we are powerful fighters." Uzume still looked doubtful, but Kushinada stood and smiled.

"Oh! Well, the Dragon lives on Mt. Mikage. It's not too far from here. Just look for it. It's hard to miss." She turned to Uzume, who was now fuming. "Lady Uzume, do not be angry. These two youths are probably the heroes you foretold. Just wait, and they will show their power and defeat the Dragon."

Ivan and Sheba walked off, Ivan bowing to Kushinada to show thanks. Outside of the town, they looked about. Sure enough, a large, sand-colored peak rose from the middle of the landscape. {Probably Mt. Mikage,} thought Ivan.

{I agree,} said Sheba, taking full advantage of the mind-link. Ivan sighed. {The Dragon's at the peak, according to Kushinada. She seemed like a kind person, not someone who'd try to trick you.} Ivan merely nodded. {Well, aren't you going to say something?}

"Sheba, listen. This 'Dragon...' What if it's a giant beast that could kill us in one breath?" His voice was filled with worry. "I mean, it's just..." She rolled her eyes and grabbed his shirtsleeve. "I get a lot of that lately," he muttered.

A final roar escaped the deep pit. "Let's go," muttered Ivan. They ran through a surprisingly easy maze - their power with Reveal pointed the way - and found themselves in a strange chamber. Large baskets with blue liquid were littered on the ground. The man they'd seen before - {Susa,} guessed Ivan - was standing in front of a giant serpent, allowing it to lick blue liquid from another basket.

"Good Dragon," he muttered. "You like the Dragonsbane, don't you?" He pulled a long sword from its sheath. As the Dragon finished drinking, he struck at it. It did nothing, merely shrugging. The action flung Susa against the nearest wall. "I don't understand... I fed it the Dragonsbane... What have I forgotten?" The Dragon turned to face him.

"Shine Plasma!" yelled Ivan. Large purple bolts struck the creature. It let out a scream before turning to face him.

"Zephyr, unleash!" yelled Sheba. Ivan could feel himself speeding up. He struck again, and this time, he managed to get in a hit with his rapier and dodge the claws.

The beast roared, and thick black smoke poured from its mouth. "Breeze, unleash!" yelled Ivan. A giant wall surrounded them, and some of the smoke was moved around. Still, it was poisonous smoke, and it almost blinded the two unfortunate Adepts.

Sheba looked at him. Suddenly, she raised her hands. "Atalanta, I summon thee," she muttered. The sky turned black. Arrows of a bright, glowing green rained down on the Dragon of Mikage. It screeched, but continued snapping its jaws. "Destruct Ray," she muttered. "Shine Plasma. Tempest." The beast grew weaker and weaker with each spell. However, it didn't die, no matter how much Psynergy the duo used. Finally, the other one in the chamber, Susa, rose to his feet. He had been completely ignored in the battle. All truth be told, he was actually watching.

"Rest, Dragon. Sleep, and do not awaken!" He plunged the sword that he carried into the beast's chest. It screamed before dying in a pool of blue liquid. "Thank you, warriors. Thank you for saving Kushinada. I am ashamed that I could not." Ivan shook his head.

"We wouldn't have been able to if you hadn't fed it that stuff. Honestly, you deserve the credit. After all, it was your sword that felled the beast." Ivan bowed. Sheba rolled her eyes.

"What he means to say is, thanks for the help. Now then, shouldn't you go off to your village and tell them the good news? After all, you don't want them to keep Kushinada prisoner, do you?" Actually, the dying screams of the Dragon

of Mount Mikage could probably be heard in the village, but she wanted him to think that he was going to be the bringer of good news. Susa nodded and ran off toward the village. A stone tablet surfaced beneath the dragon.

Ivan looked at it. "Bearer of Earth's Power, lay your hands upon me, and you will receive the power to melt into Sand." He shrugged, then tried to pick it up. It fell and broke into three pieces. Sheba grabbed after one. It twisted, contorted, and turned into a small gem. "Whoever holds me," she read aloud, "shall have the power to Halt objects in movement."

Ivan grabbed another fragment. This one merely shifted into tablet form. Ivan scanned it. Recognizing the script, he stuffed it into his belt. Another Move Tablet might come in useful. Besides, he'd lost the old one back in Sol Sanctum.

Sheba's eye spotted the third one and, without hesitation, picked it up. This one turned into a small stone idol of a man. "This is Earth's Power," it read. She stuffed it into her belt pouch.

Slowly, they turned back and headed toward Izumo.

Uzume greeted them at the gate. "Come, come! We have much to discuss!" She was no longer wearing the long white robes. Sheba asked why. "There is no need for a funeral, if Susa speaks rightly. Therefore, I have put away my funeral white. Now come, we must discuss things that need discussion. Come with me." They followed. At the large house, she bade them entrance.

Inside were Susa and Kushinada. The two were kissing, and Sheba knew that if they had been alone, she and Ivan would probably be doing the same. The two young lovers

separated, blushing furiously. "Hello, wanderers," murmured Susa. He turned to Uzume. "Lady Uzume, these are the young ones who defeated the Dragon." Ivan and Sheba looked at each other, then shook their heads. "What? But... You defeated it. You attacked it and broke it."

"No, we just weakened it. You were the one who defeated it," said Ivan. "After all, you were the one to feed it the Dragonsbane. You struck the finishing blow with that fancy sword of yours. All in all, you were instrumental in its defeat." He nodded as if to say that settled it once and for all.

Sheba nodded in agreement. "If it hadn't been for you, we would have lost. Your Dragonsbane made it easy to kill. Well, relatively easy," she amended. The thing had died hard; there was no doubt about that.

Uzume looked at them. "You mean Susa was the one who killed the Dragon?" Sheba nodded, as did Ivan. Uzume's eyes widened. "I'll be pickled in frog juice. I never expected that. Well, there is no doubt as to what will happen. I give you both my blessing," she said to Susa and Kushinada, "although I would have given it anyway." She turned to Sheba and Ivan. "Now then, I have a question for you two. Have you ever heard of the Elemental Lighthouses?"

They looked at each other. "Actually, Lady Uzume," said Ivan, "I was with a group trying to light the Lighthouses." He pulled the Jupiter Star from his one of the pockets of his breeches. "This is the Jupiter Star," he muttered, giving the gem to Uzume to hold. "Sheba was with a group trying to oppose my friends, but we've reconciled, I think." {Three days alone on a ship does tend to lend itself to discussion.}

Uzume nodded, handing the gem back. "Well then, I need not explain what I say. The beacon of Venus Lighthouse awakened the Dragon. I have no doubt that the other Elemental Guardians are waking, but they do not matter. I must explain Izumo's legend of the Lighthouses, since you will need all of the knowledge you can get, and I did vow to give this to the heroes.

"Legend says that in times of great trouble and evil, fourteen will ride to open the seals. They will be broken, and one will betray them in the end, but they will unite by the end of their journey. They will be broken at Mercury, broken anew at Venus, united at Jupiter, and betrayed at Mars. You say you have friends? They are most likely others from the group. You must light Jupiter first, though. If you do not, Mars will not let you climb to her peak.

"I have no doubt you will succeed, but I doubt your ability to carry on. You two seem to be lovers despite the fact that you were enemies. I have a gift for you." She snapped her fingers and whispered a pair of words to Susa. He nodded, then pulled back a long, thin curtain. From it, he withdrew a white rod with a shining pyramid of gold on top.

"This is for you," he said, giving the staff to Sheba. "It is the Meditation Rod, our greatest treasure. May you see the Light of Nirvana," he said, letting go of the rod.

Uzume turned to face the pair. "Now then, you must stay for the festival. No ducking out," she added, her face darkening ominously. She smiled again, though. "Don't worry, you'll have a good time. Now then, let's go have a celebration!" She led the four younger people out of the door and into the town, which was in the middle of a wild party.

Five days later, the celebration ended. After getting some help with supplies for the ship, Ivan and Sheba set their course for Contigo, and from there, Jupiter Lighthouse.

The Alhafran sun beat down on the small Idejiman vessel as it carried its passengers. Outside the city was a small Champan craft. Being led away were two men - Briggs and one of his companions.

8BTFreek: Well, that's that! Sorry to keep you waiting for so long... And for making such a long chapter...

RM: Don't listen to him. He's never sorry when he writes so much. In fact, he enjoys torturing his readers. Don't let him get away with it! Write a review and tell him how long this chapter was!

8BTFreek: Over 3,000 words - a personal max!

RM: Exactly! Get your reviewing gear on and write to him!

8BTFreek: Eshli, there's something I need you to get rid of for me!

Eshli: But Dad, I can't harm RM without good reason!

8BTFreek: He called you a pansy.

Eshli: *gives RM "death glare"* OK, now you die. *charges blaster*

RM: Eep! *runs*

Eshli: *screaming with rage* GET YOUR SORRY ASS IN HERE NOW, YOU BASTARD! I'M GONNA BLAST YOU TO KINGDOM COME! *runs after him*

8BTFreek: Who said lying never helped anyone? Well, review, and you won't be next. *grins evilly*

***Chapter 19*: Debts Repaid**

8BTFreek: OK, you asked for it! But before we get to what you asked for, here's the review responses!

REVIEW RESPONSES:

Mesoforte: [shrug] I dunno. I never said how many spells they cast. Besides, the Dragon wasn't as hard as the Mother Wyvern, or even a VL Wyvern. I made the VL Wyverns tougher than their Anemos Sanctum counterparts. As for your question: Sir, I may be cheap, but I ain't that cheap!

TemplarofNi: Nice name. Anyway, what would the "anyways" have been? Thanks for reviewing, thanks for liking!

Allexandra: Honestly, sending Alliandre? Well, I'm going to counter with Eshli. You have no idea how angry she can get when someone insults her. AN-yway... Yeah, Finals are approaching, and I abhor them. Bloody idiotic idea, if you ask me. And yes, Windshipping.

KA: Naw, I wouldn't do that to 'em. Piers and crew are already off for... You'll see. Yes, Briggs is back, but he's an OK guy, remember? And no, we've seen the last of Obaba (thankfully - I think I made her a little more of a witch than she was in the game.) Just a quick Q: Why did you say "Terror"?

ACL: Yeah, the fanatical newbies can be a pain in the ass if they aren't open-minded. Unlike us... Even though I'm probably technically a newbie too, at least I can read anything and not flame unless it's piss-poor. If it's well-written, I'll read it. And thanks for reviewing.

flamethrowerqueen: (1) Yeah, I provided it so people would understand. Thanks for the review.

ftq: (2) AU's can be confusing, yes, but they're confusing in a good way. They make you think. Thanks for reviewing a second time.

END RESPONSES

8BTFreek: Well, this chapter's got an unusual intro.

Eshli: Just in case he forgets, FREEK DOESN'T OWN GOLDEN SUN!

8BTFreek: Right. Well, here's chapter 19!

{{Chapter 19: Debts Repaid}}

The writer opened the book's pages and re-wrote the title of the second half. After all, he figured, "Part Two" isn't really an exciting name. He thought for a moment, then proceeded to write, "The Twin Lighthouses" in the book. {Much better,} he thought as he turned to the first page of the nineteenth chapter. The scratch of a pen could be heard through the village as he wrote.

{XIX}

Isaac peered off into the distance. "Say, isn't that a Champan sailing vessel?" Mia looked out with the telescope.

"Yeah, it is!" she shouted. "It looks like Briggs's other ship!" She turned. "Meep!" She jumped back. "Jenna, why do you have to stand right behind me? And when did the boat shrink?!"

"Drop the telescope, Mia," said Jenna. She rolled her eyes. Mia turned red and dropped the telescope. Jenna turned to Isaac. "Isaac, what's Briggs doing here?" The captain shrugged.

"To be perfectly honest, I have no clue." He looked over. "Could someone toss the scope?" Jenna picked it up and almost tossed it to him. Fortunately, she remembered right before she threw it that Isaac had no skill at catching things. Instead, she handed the small round tube to Isaac. "Thanks." He raised it to his eye and shouted, "Someone's taking Briggs prisoner!"

"What?" the girls chorused.

"I'm telling you, someone's trying to take Briggs prisoner!" He thrust the telescope at Jenna. "Jenna, keep an eye on Briggs and his captors. Mia, turn the sail. I'm going to be steering. Tell me if we're getting too far from them."

{XIX}

An hour later, Mia's arms were about to fall off. Jenna was also getting tired, but it was her eye that was hurting. Only Isaac wasn't showing fatigue - although that was only because he didn't want to show any signs of weakness to his crew. "How's it going, Jenna? Are we closer to them?"

"They're entering that city I saw a few minutes back." The others nodded. "I think they've arrested him. D'you think this is that Alhafra that Ivan mentioned?" Isaac thought for a moment. Mia nodded. "I think so too. Let's see... What do we do?"

"Well, we find out what's going on." Isaac ordered them to pilot the craft into the dock. The dockmaster looked at them with a nasty sneer and a decidedly xenophobic look.

"Identify yerselves!" he shouted. "Yer not takin' a space in the docks until ye can tell me who ye are!"

"The good ship Rusty Nail, Dockmaster, requesting permission to land." Isaac had picked the ship's new name, and he rather liked it. Mia and Jenna rolled their eyes. "If you don't permit it, we could always take our goods somewhere else..."

"No, no! Ye got a place 'ere, if'n ye want it, that is." Isaac tossed down a few coins. "Thank ye, kind sir. Ye've got a kind 'art, that yew 'as." Isaac took a closer look at the man. He had a rough sort of face, and one eye was covered with a patch. He'd somehow gotten hold of a worn noble's coat that was about fifteen sizes too large, and he was wearing threadbare boots. Around his wasted waist was a belt that was somehow tight, and resting in a loop on that belt was a scimitar. "Take care o' yer goods, kind sir. I hopes yew have a nice time at our port." He scratched the patch unconsciously.

Isaac placed down a gangplank, keeping his sword within reaching distance. "Thank you, my good man. Now then, could you direct us to the nearest reputable inn?" The dockmaster growled at the word "reputable", but he nodded just the same.

"There's an inn, I mind, only a few streets south o' here. A bit o' a rough place, but ye'd do well ter visit it. A popular drinkin' 'ole, 'tis." Isaac shook his head. The dockmaster noticed his company. "Ah, so yer bringin' women inter Alhafra, eh? Well, p'raps you'd rather dine in the Mayor's 'ouse. 'Tis no bad place, but... The ol' codger thinks 'e's above the workin' man, 'e does." The dockmaster spat on the ground. Isaac gave the man another coin.

"Thank you, my good man. Oh, and if anyone tries to steal our cargo, tell me. I'd like to see if the locals know how to use their weapons." He gestured to the Gaia Blade. The dockmaster grinned nervously, then nodded. "Thank you, sir." He and Mia walked off toward the center of the town.

As they progressed, all three of them became more disgusted. Apparently, this city was a capital of debauchery, a hive for all of the worst sorts of people. The dockmaster seemed to be civilized when compared with the rogues and crooks that inhabited the city. "Disgusting," remarked Isaac at one point. "How can they stand it? It's worse than I could ever think." They passed a drunkard on the street. As they passed him, he whistled and shouted at the two women. Jenna made a threatening gesture with her saber, and Mia barely contained her rage.

As they approached the center of town, they passed a man who might have been a law enforcement official. Isaac strolled up to the man and asked where the Jail was. "Aye," he said, "that's the building you'd least like to be in. It's over that way, but I wouldn't recommend-" His words were lost on them, though. They ran off in the direction he'd pointed.

As they approached the drab building, a man dropped a sword in their path. {Deja vu,} thought Isaac. "Hold on. Ye won't be getting' in without good reason." The man sneered. He wasn't exactly a small man - actually, small would be a bad name. He was wide, tall, and broad in shoulder; he carried (among other things) a sword with a crimson-stained blade, three daggers with skulls imprinted on the hilts, and a cutlass with thirty-nine notches in the back of the blade. All in all, he looked a fearsome foe.

"And you would argue with me because...?" asked Isaac. He gripped the hilt of the Gaia Blade again, and Jenna gripped

her saber's hilt. Mia stepped back, preparing to use some of her more potent magic.

"No reason, master," said the man. "It's just, this be the prison. Why a merchant and two ladies would go in there I've no clue, but yeh'd best have a guard." He smiled, revealing rotten yellow teeth, a few of which were missing. His eyes gleamed with malicious intent. "If'n ye like, I could be the one ter help yew tree."

"No thank you," said Isaac, his voice firm. "We'll be getting on just fine." When the man didn't get out of his way, Isaac concentrated his strength and shoved the man into the doorway. Because he shoved right at the man's chest, he stepped back a few paces and hit the door. Isaac drew the Gaia Blade. "Get. Out. Of. My. Way." The man backed off, his eyes wide. He ran off, not taking a look back. Isaac shoved open the heavy iron door with some effort.

Standing in a grimy little cell was Briggs, the leader of Champa. "Briggs!" shouted Isaac. "What are you doing here?"

"Who are you?" he shouted. Isaac smacked his forehead. Briggs wouldn't recognize him, of course; they had only met him in a courtroom. He walked closer. "Wait, you're... You're the ones who managed to destroy my grandmother's Salamander, weren't you?" Jenna nodded. "Well, could you help me out of here?" The three looked at each other, then nodded again. "Thanks."

Mia just had to ask one question. "Why did you come here? Our friend said that you had bad relations with Alhafra. I can see why, of course - piracy, hedonism, really disgusting things..." She cut herself off. "So why come here?"

"I wasn't coming here, really. I was planning on going to Madra - my wife's mother still lives there - I met my wife while I was on a merchant vessel traveling between Champa and Mad-" Isaac cut him off.

"Okay, so why did you stop off here?" he asked.

"Well, the Alhafran 'navy' - if pirates can be called a navy - attacked my ship. I was forced to land. Don't try to deal with the Mayor - he's a cutthroat, a former footpad who did in his predecessor. At least, that's what the spies said." The Adepts seemed shocked at his words. "Yes, we have spies here. They're useful. Now then, could you please get me out?" Isaac nodded and cast Quake on the door. The rusty hinges shattered and the door fell forward. "Thanks," he said.

"Not so fast, yew. Ye're under arrest fer breakin' inter the jail and tryin' ter free a prisoner. The penalty fer yew, young sir, is death. O carse, the young ladies will 'ave free room and board 'ere in Al'afra, if'n they chooses it." The three of them turned around. There stood the dockmaster with about five other men. "But if'n they don't, the penalty fer them is death as well. Well, what's it gonna be?" He grinned cruelly.

"We fight," said Isaac, drawing his sword.

"Very well. Ole Claptrap here gets the right of first kill, since ye're the ones what caused 'im ter come runnin' ter us. Claptrap?" The large man Isaac had seen nodded dumbly, then plodded over.

"A new notch in my cutlass. 'Tis a beautiful day fer yew ter die." Before he could make a move, though, Isaac and Jenna had buried their blades in his body. Pulling out his blade with a swift motion, Isaac cleaned it on the man's jacket. Jenna also pulled hers out, but she was too scared to do

anything more. She had just killed a man who had done nothing to harm her. The dockmaster stared.

"Get 'em!" he shouted. The other four men, as well as the old dockmaster himself, charged. Mia flung a Glacier spell at them, and the five were frozen in ice. Jenna followed Mia's attack with a double-slice with her sword, and Isaac cast Mother Gaia. Soon, two of the men were dead, the dockmaster was in pain, and the other two henchmen were unconscious.

"Now!" shouted Isaac. Mia and Jenna grabbed Briggs and dragged him from the room while the guards were recuperating. As soon as they got on the Idejiman ship, they cast off. Briggs looked about.

"Hey, this isn't the ship I lent you! What happened to her?" Mia turned to him.

"Your fine ship got tossed off somewhere in the earthquake after Venus Lighthouse was lit. Does that explain it?" He nodded, somewhat sagely. He smiled then, and asked them to take him to Madra. The three didn't discuss anything - they simply looked at each other and nodded. "Shouldn't take more than a day, if the Idejiman know their maps," said Mia. Briggs assured them that they did.

"Good," said Isaac. "I don't know about you two, but we can't stand being in one place while others are watching for too long." He made to circle his arm around Jenna, but she didn't really look like she needed a hug. She looked like she needed a shoulder to cry on. "What's wrong, Jen?"

"I... I killed a man, but he wasn't trying to do... anything... I didn't mean..." Isaac shook his head.

Briggs interjected. "Jenna, did you see his cutlass?" She nodded. "Did you see the notches on the blade?" She nodded again. "Each notch was for a successful raid or killing spree. Most of those were merchant ships or peaceful villages." Her eyes widened in shock. "Also, do you know what they would have done with you if they'd not killed you?" She shook her head.

"But I'm not sure I want to know. Let's just say it'll never happen and leave it at that, okay?" Briggs nodded.

In a whisper, he asked Mia if she was noble. "She might as well be," answered Mia in a similar whisper. "She's the daughter of the leader of Lalivero. He's almost a minor noble, and he's got that kind of power. Fortunately, from what I hear, he doesn't abuse it." Briggs nodded sagely.

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As they approached Madra, Briggs told them about other places they might like to see. "There's Yallam, home of the blacksmith Sunshine - you've probably heard of him?" They nodded. "And there's also Garoh. Trust me, that one's a town of oddballs if I ever saw one. Still, you should go there. It'll be educational. Just don't go the night of the full moon. Creepy stuff happens then." The two girls jumped at the mention of the "creepy stuff," Isaac let out a cough of disbelief. "Believe what you will," said Briggs with a little shrug. "I'm just saying what I've heard in ports. They say the same kind of thing in Mikasalla," he added, as if the little village's opinion made any difference.

As he exited the ship upon docking at the cleaner and more respectable port of Madra, they bid him a fond farewell. "I'll be staying here until the troubles tide over. If you find my

ship, could you bring her here?" They nodded, deciding to ask why he called the boat "her" later.

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"How far is it?!"

"Just a little further... Through this mist and we'll be at the gates into the main island."

"Well, hurry up!"

"My God! What the hell?!"

{([--])}

8BTFreek: I didn't want to give away too much in the last few minutes, but you should be able to figure out who's next chapter.

Eshli: Yeah, you guys are smarter than me, and I've got it figured out!

8BTFreek: Uh, Eshli, that's because you're my muse. You know what's going on anyway.

Eshli: Oh yeah. Well, review, or Freek will not update ever again!

8BTFreek: I'll update, I'll just be sad. So review and I'll be in a better mood when I write this chapter.

Eshli: Can't I at least rain destruction on their pitiful villages?

8BTFreek: No, you threatened that last time. But do this, or I'll unleash every villain I've ever defeated upon you. I don't

have them with me, but I can call them! Mwahaha!
Mwahaha! Ok, evil laughing done now. Review, please!

***Chapter 20*: Life Is Reason Enough**

8BTFreek: Well, another day, another type-up thingy. Let's get to the reviews!

REVIEW RESPONSES:

Mesoforte: Huh, you're good at this. No, you guessed right. Thanks for the review.

TemplarofNi: I'd give you good odds on that one. A plasma rifle, a beam saber, and a blaster pistol, and you think she can be beaten easily? Be glad I didn't give her a laser cannon. Well, thanks for the review.

KA: P'raps, I don't really know. Thanks for reviewing. 'twas a good chapter.

Allexandra: Uh-oh... There's not really much going on, I hope. I mean, Eshli's a good kid, but she can... overreact... a bit. And yes, Briggs is cool.

END RESPONSES

Eshli: WHAT?!?! Alright, let me at that [This text has been censored by 8BTFreek to prevent some reviewers from getting pissed off. Thank you and have a nice day.]

8BTFreek: A-hrem.

Eshli: Oh, I'm going to bloody KILL that God-damned...
GAAH!

8BTFreek: Eshli, calm down. Now what did I say about using language like that?

Eshli: [rolls eyes] Not 'til I'm thirteen, poppa-san.

8BTFreek: No, what did I really say?

Eshli: Uh, don't use it unless the person you're describing insults you?

8BTFreek: Aargh, I give up. If you're going to fight her, then just go there and do it.

Eshli: OK, I will! [Exits FreekLair(c)]

Nynaeve: Damn, she's angry.

8BTFreek: Yeah. Well, here's chapter 20!

Nynaeve: And Freek doesn't own Golden Sun. Be thankful for that.

{{Chapter 20: Life is Reason Enough}}

"My God! What the hell?!" Karst screamed as a giant figure rose out of the mist.

Agatio quickly began gathering power for one of the more feared Proxan attacks - burning an enemy from the inside out. Unfortunately, it required extreme concentration, which he was incapable of. Menardi tried to aid him by blocking the beast's attacks, but this only weakened his concentration. Finally, he couldn't stand it. He released the energy, hoping that it would break the creature.

The thing shrugged off the burst of Mars Psynergy, although it was a bit damaged. Saturos quickly cast several fire-based spells at it, destroying the trident it was holding. The beast screamed with rage, then launched a gigantic wave at the five Adepts. The Proxans dived into the cabins of the boat,

but Piers stood and took the full force of the wave. He allowed the water to flow around him, then struck the beast when it wasn't looking. "Die, foul monster," he muttered.

Unfortunately, it merely grew irritated. The Proxans removed themselves from the cabins and ran to fight the beast. Saturos began to concentrate. "Keep the beast from breaking my concentration," he said to the other Proxans. Menardi nodded, attacking the thing with her sickle.

"What is this?" Karst asked. She too used her weapon against the being, but neither blade did much. Agatio quickly summoned a small bit of his power and forced a dragon to rise and hurt the creature.

"It's called Poseidon," said Piers, swinging at the beast again. "It's supposed to be the guardian of Lemuria, but instead it turned on us and tried to destroy us. We managed to force it underwater for a few thousand years. The beacons must have broken our seal and reawakened the beast." He cast a healing spell on the the sisters and Agatio.

Suddenly, Saturos glowed a sinister red. Menardi and Agatio ran backwards into the cabin. Karst paused a moment, grabbed Piers, and dragged him into the cabin. Saturos grinned evilly. "So you wish to play? Play with this, then." With that, he bent his head and concentrated. The red intensified and deepened. Shrieks of pain came from the giant. It began glowing, a slight blue aura coming from it.

"What the? What's he doing?" Piers looked at the others. "What's going on?"

Karst took a deep breath. "He's using one of our people's most powerful and feared destructive techniques. He is melting this 'Poseidon' from the inside out, forcing it to destroy itself in the most painful way possible. It's rarely

used because it's considered torture, but in this case, he feels justified." Piers's mouth dropped open.

Quickly, the four ran outside to look at what was going on. Poseidon was no longer there, but there was a pile of ash floating on top of the water. It quickly sank below the surface. Saturos stood weeping. Menardi walked over to him and put her arm around his shoulder. "I - I swore that I would never use that power again," he said, turning into Menardi and placing his head on her shoulder. "That power was never meant for anyone to have, and I used it." She put her arms around him and held him.

"There, there, dear husband. You had to - there was no alternative. I only wish I'd had the wisdom to realize it." Saturos shook his head.

"Foolishness, not wisdom, dear. There is too much of that, and I did nothing to aid in solving the problem." He lifted his head and kissed her cheek. "But now it is over, yes? There will be no more talking about that." He nodded, then stalked off into their shared cabin. Piers walked to the helm and sailed the ship into the port.

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Their arrival at port was what Saturos and Menardi had expected. The Lemurians on guard had recoiled at the sight of four Proxans walking off the ship with the Prince, but they had shrugged and allowed them in, since they were obviously either guests of the prince or had been taken prisoner by him. They could recognize the military leaders (at least, they thought they were military leaders; the real military leaders were walking behind those two.) Still, there were some unexpected things. Everyone was bowing more deeply than they should have. Piers was worried.

As they approached the Palace, a man ran out. Piers recognized him as his uncle, Julius. "Piers, you're finally back! My Lord!" Piers was slightly shocked by this. Uncle Julius had never called anyone "My Lord" except his father.

"Uncle, why do you call me 'my lord?' Where's Mother?" His uncle's face fell. "Well, where is she? I've brought some state visitors to talk with her."

His uncle looked away, a sad look on his face. "Your mother - my sister - is... I'm sorry, Piers. I had hoped to avoid this. If I could make everything right, she'd still be alive. Unfortunately..." He grabbed Piers's hand. "But now you're King. Look on the bright side. Now you get to boss around old Uncle Julius like you've always wanted to."

Piers said nothing for a long time. Finally, his mouth creaked open. "Uncle Julius, get me a rope. After I have the rope, I hand power over to you. It will be an informal ceremony, but it's all that I can legally do without having to go in front of the Senate." He gulped, then walked up to his room.

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Karst looked at Piers's retreating back. "Uh, Master Julius, sir, where is Piers going?" She looked the old man in the eye. "Why is he requesting rope? And what happened to the kind and gentle man who I met at Idejima?" Julius's head dropped further, and his face sunk to an unbelievable low.

"It is, I am afraid, Mistress of Prox, the King's prerogative. He wishes to end his reign out of his grief. I ask that you please leave him be. I will not send for the rope. He may have me hanged for this, but I will not allow himself to end his kingship over a little incident." He turned his back to the group. "I will not."

Karst tapped him on the shoulder. "Where is the King's bedroom?" Julius spun around with a frightened look on his face. "I do not wish to do him harm," she added quickly. "I merely wish to speak with him. He seems dead-set on dying, so I would like one last conversation with him." Julius blinked and swallowed before replying.

"Up - up the stairs, Mistress of Prox. Third door from the left. He may have bolted the door, though. Piers is a bit... reclusive... despite his youth." He said it as though being reclusive were perfectly acceptable for an adult. She nodded thanks, then ran to the room and tore the door open.

Piers looked at her, tears running down his face. "I... I'm sorry, Piers," she said. She walked over to him and put her arm around his shoulder. "She must have been a good person, to deserve your grief. Had I known her, I would be weeping also, I think." He said nothing, merely looking at her. "But you are still alive. There are still things you can do. Do you think she-" He broke down, began sobbing on her shoulder. "There, there, Pierslein. Tell me about her, yes?" She raised his head to look into his eyes. He blinked back more tears, then nodded.

"A kinder soul and a better queen you could never think of. I did not deserve the honor of being her son. She was... She was... She could do no wrong. She sent out seekers to find Father, but Poseidon destroyed them. She's the one who ordered all who were living here to remain. I disobeyed her to find Father. I thought..." His head dropped back to her shoulder. "But now I'm alone. There's no reason for me to stay alive."

"Yes, there is. Pierslein, why are you wishing to hang yourself?" A note of sadness touched her voice, but she

didn't notice. In the front of her mind, she was trying to rationalize her decision. {He's the last of his line, and a new king to boot. If I don't keep him alive, then there will be no way for Lemuria to get back on track. But isn't Lemuria our enemy? So why would I want them to have stability? A confused enemy is easier to take down than one that is together. But it's not right. Why do I feel that way?}

He looked at her. "You can never know why. You're a foreigner, and you have others."

She gave a hollow laugh. "One other, Pierslein." He stopped her.

"And why do you call me that? What does it mean? Weakling?" She had to keep herself from saying what it actually was.

"It's, um, a familiar form of a name. Not a very common one, but it's one that's used." He looked at her, trying to discern the truth.

"A lover's name? Is that it?" She shifted her gaze from him. "Is that why you're doing this? Because you love me?" She turned red and muttered something. "It's sweet, but... Your love is wasted. I've not long to live. You wouldn't want to love a dead man, would you?" Her gaze turned to him.

"Why do you wish to hang yourself? Is it because of your loss? How selfish." She turned her back to him. "I have lost, and not just foolish things, as so many in my position would claim. I've lost both parents, like you have." His head whipped around. "Menardi says Mother died after giving birth to me. Father died when I was seven. My sister practically raised me." She looked him in the eyes. "My parents were kind souls, I think. I didn't know Mother, and Father's just a blur from childhood."

He swallowed. "I know I'm going to get slapped around by you for this, but how... How old are you?" She laughed.

"Slapped around? If you asked my sister, she'd slap you, but I think you're too cute to hurt you in that way. Although a scar would make you look more handsome... I will tell you, if you tell me how old you are." He nodded. "Fine. I'm thirty." His eyes widened. "What?"

"That's not what I would've guessed. I'd have guessed nineteen, perhaps twenty. That's part of the reason why I was so... hesitant... to talk with you. I thought you were young, very young." She smiled, then punched him in the gut.

"You wouldn't talk to me because I was young-looking. Perhaps you thought you were robbing the cradle? And just how old are you? After all, turnabout is fair play, is it not?" He nodded. "Then tell me."

"A week from today," he said, pausing to clear his throat, "will be my fifty-eighth birthday." He looked at her. "I was thirty-eight when Father left twenty years ago. He promised to bring me back two things: a sword forged from Mythrill from the Loho mines, and peace with the Proxan Empire." Karst let out a hollow laugh.

"Empire, that's a good one. We're no more an Empire than Lemuria is a fishbowl." She looked at him. "But the sword can be gotten, and if you really want peace, then I could put in a good word with the Elders. They're as tired of fighting as you are." He smiled at her.

"You would do that for me? But why?" His smile took a curious turn, and it became a frown. "Do you have any wish for personal gain? Any wish that it might mean the end of

something you cannot get out of?" She looked at him with downcast eyes.

"It is Proxan custom," she said slowly, "for the Kommandant and the Generalissimo to get married. The custom is so deeply embedded that it might as well be law. It is certainly revered that much by some. But... That would mean I would have to marry that brute Agatio, and..." Her head hung. "I hate the brute. He is the opposite of what I find attractive. Usually, the process of selecting a Kommandant and a Generalissimo takes about fifteen to twenty months. At the end of it, the officers are compatible if they were to marry, and the current leaders can retire and get married. But with us, Saturos and Menardi were raised to the position of Elder immediately, and we were the first two they saw." He turned her around and embraced her.

"Then I will help you to get around this, if I can. If I can get peace." He whispered in her ear, "Karst, is there any other reason, besides love and peace, that you would want me to live? Those are enough, but I was wondering if there was a third."

She smiled and whispered, "Life is reason enough. Love and peace are merely parts of it." She kissed his cheek, and he turned the color of a sunset. An attendant peeked into the room.

"King Piers," he said, "would you like anything? A chaplain, perhaps, or the name of a good seamstress? Perhaps a little piece by the Royal Goldsmith?" The two glared at him. "Ah, right... I'll just be leaving now... But if you want any of that, just ring and I'll get them for you." He nodded, then bowed out of the room.

"Well, where were we?" asked Karst. Piers was red all over, and she couldn't hear what he mumbled. "Oh, I remember." She leant closer to him, her eyes closed, expecting a kiss.

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Piers leant back, a little alarmed. {Gods, I think it'd be okay, but...} He turned redder as his thoughts turned to her actions. {It's safe to say she loves me... But what if I don't reciprocate her feelings? I'd feel horrible. I mean... Oh, to hell with it.} She was now bending so far over he could look down her battle armor. He moved forward, catching her lips on his in his first kiss in fifteen years. {Yeah, but last time the girl ran off with a palace servant. I don't think Karst is about to do that to you.} Silently, he agreed with the voice inside as he held her.

The next day, the Coronation ceremony was held, and it was announced that the king would be "going with the Proxan leaders to discuss peace while going on a mission of global importance." Instead of spending the day in revelry, he spent it on a ship, heading off toward Contigo with the four leaders of his country's (hopefully soon former) enemies.

But after the talks, he went off to a corner of the ship to talk some more with one of the leaders: Kommandant Karst Tsynder, co-leader of the Proxan Armies. He had to find out some "important information vital to the success of peace," although Saturos would probably have suspected that "getting to know the person behind the scythe" wasn't really all that necessary for his supposed reason. At least he seemed to bless the two of them. Piers smiled as he walked off to the Captain's cabin, extremely satisfied. He'd received a personal dinner invitation for the next day, and he didn't plan to turn it down. After all, getting to know the Kommandant was an important part of "creating peaceful

connections between the two former enemies." At least, it was in his mind.

{eoc}

8BTFreek: Well, that's it, the end of the chapter. Sorry if it's a bit anticlimactic and wordy, that's just how I wrote it.

Nynaeve: Wordy? It makes the Lord of the Rings look like Cliff's Notes!

8BTFreek: Ow, that hurt. Well, review, or I'll send my wordy wrath upon you! Mwahahahaha!

Nynaeve: Urgh. Just review, or he'll hurt all of us. Speaking of us... [goes looking for other muses]

***Chapter 21*: Reason for Freezin'**

8BTFreek: I'm back from the grave! But seriously, let's get to the reviews.

REVIEW RESPONSES:

TemplarofNi: Uh, problem! Your Muses will have to leave, since Eshli isn't even here right now. Thanks for the review, anyway.

Allexandra: Sorry about things over there. Yeah, I like romance, which is why it wriggles its way into pretty much everything I do. And he's happy now, which is important.

Rain Child (1): Yeah, I use that phrase a lot. Don't ask why. And yes, Alhafra was different, but that's just because I really wanted to make it a den of evil.

Rain Child (2): Random is good! Well, the way I use it, which is accidental randomness. Yeah. And yes, I too could live without Conservato. I just wanted to finish the chapter quickly, and the main action depended on them not being in Lemuria for a long amount of time.

Mesoforte: Yeah. I'm of Saturos's opinion on the technique. Thanks for the compliment. I dunno, the pairing just fit, and who passes up opportunity? Good opportunity, that is.

KA: Well, your wondering will soon come to an end! We are going to get into a new chapter, starring the Four Friends.

Black-D: Thanks for the review.

END RESPONSES

8BTFreek: Well, that's the end of that. Now then, onto chapter 21 (Jeez, this is getting long! Longer than anything else I've written, that is.)

Rand: And Freek doesn't own Golden Sun or its concepts. Now then, we members of Muses' Union, Local Chapter 58113 need to talk with you about violations of subclauses 118, 119, and 120 of the contracts, as well as some concerns some of our members had about foreign outsourcing of our jobs? [points at TemplarofNi's muses]

8BTFreek: Gulp. Uh, they aren't supposed to be here. As for the contract thingies... Let me say in my defense: I didn't do it. Well, here's chapter 21 of Against My Friends.

{Chapter 21: Reason for Freezin'}

Felix stared at the giant blue tower. "And you're telling me that what we want is in there?" The others eyed the tower with suspicious gazes - except Hama, who nodded fervently.

"My visions have told me that this tower contains something vital to our success, yes." {I only wish it didn't hold discord and enmity.} She shrugged. "Let's go inside. That's the only way we'll get what we need." Taking a somewhat rare initiative, she marched into the frozen tower, almost instantly regretting it. "And can we get a fire?" she asked, looking around.

"Yes, o sister of mine," said Garet, producing a quick burst of flame that warmed them considerably. "Now then, let's get whatever we're here to get so we can get out quickly, hm?" The others nodded.

Hama took one step into the tower, the others following quickly behind her. She walked down the small hallway and into the next room, at which point she cursed rather loudly.

"Damn it all to hell!" she shouted. A large wall of ice blocked her way. "What we need is behind there, but there's no way we can get it. Damn it!" Gareth looked at her curiously.

"Uh, Hama, you seem to have forgotten that there is a Mars Adept here?" She turned and glared at him. He ignored her, placing his hands on the ice and concentrating. While he did manage to melt some of the ice off, it merely grew back, pushing his hands out.

"Brilliant, Mr. I'm-the-Mars-Adept-who-knows-everything," muttered Alex. He walked up to the ice wall and analyzed it. "Hm... Absorbs fire, can't be drilled through... yet clearly ice..." He paced the length of the room, which meant that everybody got out of his way. "Psynergetic ice," he said. "Ice created using Psynergy, designed to last for eternity - or at least until the proper spell is used against it. And since it's been cracked, I have to assume that it was some sort of explosion spell, probably very weak against most things." He turned to Hama. "What exactly is behind this wall?"

She shot him a glare before speaking. "If I knew, I would know how to get through. As it is, we're stuck. All I know is, we have to get around this wall." She sighed, then turned into the other room and took another look. It wasn't really a hallway, she discovered: Instead, it was an open room, with stairways leading to a flooded lower level, and icy walls that seemed to close in on you. {If only I could boil away the water,} she thought. "Garet, try boiling away this water. It's just sitting there - I doubt it's Psynergetic." He nodded, then began focusing his power to boil away the water.

"Hama, could you send some lightning through this water? It'd make my job easier." She nodded, a little satisfaction creeping into her. She knew that Alex and Gareth were almost enemies, and since Alex had the nerve to be unemotional

about Sheba's death, she was going to make him suffer as much as she could without intentionally distancing him. She concentrated, sending lightning and plasma through the undisturbed water. Well, formerly undisturbed - the lightning and plasma, combined with Gareth's Psynergy, caused the water to churn and bubble, until finally it boiled away. "Let's go," he said, marching down the stairs and through a door that had appeared.

The others followed him. Though it was uncomplicated, it was long, and monsters kept popping up from the ice (especially Ice Golems, although those were relatively easy to defeat, since Gareth could blast through them without a second thought.) Alex grumbled every time Gareth managed to defeat one of the things, muttering about his power over fire. "It'll be your downfall," he kept whispering to himself. "Just you wait, weakling."

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Gareth looked around the top of the tower. "What a lovely place," he muttered. "Too bad it has to be so damn COLD!" He shivered instinctively, the cold piercing his skin. He looked about. "Hey! There's a little... whatchamacalit... on top of that spire!" He walked over and grabbed it, looking at it. A large red ruby sat inside a silvery design, and it had strange runes crawling all over. "Say, Hama, what does this say?" She walked over to him.

"Let's see..." She cast Reveal, and the writing materialized. "Where there once was something, let it Burst into nothingness." She shrugged. "Probably an item to grant a certain Psynergy. I wouldn't be surprised if this is the key to the impassable ice block." He smiled.

"Well, let's go try it out, shall we? After all, the sooner we get through with this, the sooner I can see Mia." Hama shot a worried look backwards. Gareth had so far refrained from mentioning Mia in Alex's presence, but now...

Alex was predictable. "Why? So that you can agree to be best man at our wedding?" Hama rolled her eyes. Alex was thick as mud sometimes. A snarl spread across Gareth's face, and he clenched his fists. "Face it, you Martian Lump. She doesn't love you, she's mine, and that's all there is to it." A gloved fist caught Alex in the stomach. Despite her "unbiased" stance in this conflict, Hama couldn't help but smile. Alex was getting what he deserved, in her eyes. Right now, it happened to be a beating from Gareth.

Felix walked over to her, standing by her side. "What'cha watching?" he asked nonchalantly.

"Gareth's beating up Alex for insulting Mia's intelligence. Alex seems a bit possessive, so... yes. It's actually quite enjoyable. Want to watch?" He smiled at her, then nodded. Alex let out a sound that resembled an "oof", but it looked much more painful. "What was that?"

"Gareth just got him in the lower back, the gut, and the jaw at the same time. I swear, the kid's gotten much faster in the past few days." He shrugged. "Maybe it's because he thinks if he gets things done faster, he'll see Mia sooner. But you know? By now, I kinda wish we weren't enemies. It'd be much, much easier. And we wouldn't have lost Sheba and your brother." He held her close. "Don't worry, dear, we'll get through this." She nodded, holding back the tears she'd wanted to cry since seeing Ivan disappear by leaping off of that damned lighthouse.

"Damn, son," came a voice behind them. The two turned around to see Gareth standing there, holding Alex in a headlock and looking at them. An expression of wonder was on his face. "General, I now have the utmost respect for you. May I please keep knocking the shit out of this worthless piece of trash?" Felix shook his head.

"We still need him as a healer. I can't do jack squat, and - sorry to say this, dear - neither can Hama." She nodded. "And unless you gained those marvelous abilities, I don't think we can get by without our healer, and he can't get by with a broken nose, I think. Let him heal himself, and let's go down the stairs and back to the Ice Wall."

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A shattering noise could be heard from inside the glass wall. "It's breaking apart," said Gareth, focusing more energy into the Burst spell. The wall began shaking. Something rumbled on the other side. Suddenly, Gareth was flung back by an explosion. A titanic cloud of dust rose, and ice shards went flying, some striking the party members, some missing them completely. After the dust had cleared, they could see a small room through a gap big enough for the Mother Wyvern to walk through - if it actually walked instead of flying, although it looked like its wingspan might fit through.

Gareth walked into the room. Something glowed on a table behind the ice wall. He reached out to grab it. The result was a strangely moving hand as he hit what appeared to be an invisible barrier. {What is that thing?} he thought as he looked at the round, glowing, rough-hewn stone. {My hand just slid right away from it. I wonder if it's dangerous...} Curious, he stared at the stone.

Felix walked up to him. "What? Why are you staring at it?"
Garet shrugged.

"It wasn't moving," he said, looking at it. "When I tried to take it, my hand just sort of slid off of it. I'm still wondering what it is." Felix shrugged, then extended a hand towards it.

Picking up the rock, he tossed it between his hands. "Well, whatever it is, it's certainly old. I know! Hama, would you be kind enough as to help us figure out what this is?" Hama walked into the room, followed closely by a wincing, frightened Alex. She took the rock in both hands and examined it.

"Well, I found runes... It bestows some kind of Psynergy, I guess, but I can't feel a thing. Reveal." The power flowed through her, showing the true nature of the rock. "To the bearer of the Earth's power, I grant the ability to Grind stones to dust." She gave the thing to Felix. "So far as I can tell, it's called the Grindstone. Or perhaps the Stone of Dust. You'd have to ask the Doomsayer for more information. After all, she is extremely knowledgable."

"No, I think that it'll be good enough to know that this is the Something Stone." He grabbed it, and it glowed. "Hm, maybe 'bearer of Earth's power means I'm the only one who can use it." He shrugged, then pocketed the stone. "Well, let's go," he said, striding out of the room. Alex walked close behind him, looking back several times, but Garet wasn't in the mood to pummel Alex into the ground. He was busy thinking about Mia.

{eoc}

8BTFreek: Does that clear up everything?

Rand: Yeah, it does. Okay, no contract violations. FF, get back to... uh... whatever you were doing.

Alex: Okay, Rand. Listen, I have a question. What the hell were they sent for?

8BTFreek: Uh, their employer sent them to... dispatch of Eshli, I guess. Would you like me to bring her back?

Fearsome Foursome and Red Mage: NO!!!

Gannon: Not until she's calmed down. I need a break.

RM: Besides, how can I properly disturb you when she's distracting me?

8BTFreek: Oh, that makes me feel so good. Well, review, my friends! It'll make me happy.

***Chapter 22*: The Legendary Sword**

Author's Note: I'm back, baby. This is Against My Friends, chapter 22... BOOYAH! It's been sitting around so long that I forgot the original title... ah well.

Chapter 22: The Legendary Sword

"Welcome, weary travelers," said the young man at the town gates, noticing the sea-worn look each of the youths had. "What, pray you, are your names?"

The older of the two, a sandy-haired young man, stepped forward and said, "I'm Ivan of Vale, and this is Sheba of Contigo." Neither of the names registered with the gatekeeper.

Perhaps these are wanderers from far-off places. I should bring them to Akafubu. He'll be most interested in them. He smiled at them, and bade them follow him.

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So, said Sheba through a mind link, what do you make of this place?

Well, it's certainly not in mourning, came Ivan's reply. *All appears to be well.* They walked together, following the polite young man who'd stopped them at the gates.

That's a relief. Very few people weeping over a death that hasn't happened yet.

Yes, but until we killed that dragon, there was no reason to expect her to survive. Ivan looked up. Standing before them was a large building. "Who lives there?" he asked aloud.

Their young guide answered almost immediately. "This is the house of Akafubu, successor to Oeia, witch doctor," he said, grinning. "He is the wisest man in all Kibombo, and the cleverest." And, with not a word more, he whisked them inside and shoed them up the ladder.

As they climbed, they shared thoughts. *Ivan, how old do you suppose this Akafubu is? Fifty? Sixty?*

Twenty or thirty. I'm guessing that the whole "Successor of" thing is recent – our young guide hesitated a moment with this Akafubu's name.

I didn't hear any hesitation.

Probably my over trained ear, then. I hear all sorts of pauses and stops – growing up in a politician's house teaches you to listen for them.

I suppose... Sheba looked around the room they'd just entered. Where's Akafubu?

I don't know, replied Ivan as a flash of gray light filled the room with a dense smoke. By the time it was cleared, a twenty-three year-old or so man with a large feathered headdress was introducing himself.

"I am Akafubu, witch doctor. Who enters with gloved hands?" All was said before the smoke cleared. Ivan and Sheba exchanged glances.

"I am Sheba of Contigo," said the latter, bending into a curtsey. "And this is Ivan of Vale." She indicated her bowing companion.

Before she could say anything else, though the witch doctor asked, "Know you the power?" He paused, then added, "The

secrets of mind's fury."

Ivan's habit of blurting the truth beat Sheba's careful nature to the answer. "This power?" he asked, casting a simple whirlwind spell. Akafubu smiled.

"Yes, prophesized master." Both of the Jupiter Adepts looked at each other. Before either could speak, however, Akafubu walked over to a glass case. Curious, they followed him. Inside was a glittering sword, its silver blade occasionally pulsing with a purple glow. Its blade was in the style of a katana, and the hilt seemed made of amethyst.

"What is it?" asked Ivan curiously.

A sword, replied Sheba.

I know that, said Ivan. "So," he asked, "what's so special about it?"

Akafubu grinned as he replied, "This is the sword known throughout the world as the Kikuichimonji, thought lost for all time." He paused to look at Ivan's face. An expression of wonder was fixed on it. "I assume, then, that you would have it?" he asked. Ivan nodded furiously.

"But you would never part with it, without a fight, right?" Akafubu nodded. "How many?" He held up one finger.

Sheba began to grow uncomfortable. She'd now read all of the legends, and this situation reminded her of a fight to the death between Asura the Proud and Raiden the Strong. Neither had survived; Raiden's dying blow had killed Asura.

Ivan was busy enquiring further. "How long is the fight?"

"Until one of us is beaten."

"If I win, I get the sword?" Another nod. "And if I lose?"

"You may stay ere as long as you like, but you may not have the sword." Ivan nodded, contemplated for a moment, then held out a hand. Sheba knocked it aside.

"First," she said, "who decides which one is beaten?"

"Whoever either concedes or is knocked unconscious."

"How will this fight be-"

"Kicks and blows. No weapons, no armor." Sheba reluctantly pulled her arm back, Ivan re-extended his, and Akafubu grasped it firmly. After they settled on a time and place (the next day at noon in the center of town) , the two Adepts descended the ladder.

Seems suspicious, thought Sheba. A blade that nobody's seen in years, and it's only a fistfight away?

Stranger things have happened, replied Ivan.

I guess so... But I still don't like it. Ivan, he could wallop you without a word!

Not so. When our group was in Xian - Ivan felt a pang of loss. His friends probably thought him dead. He shuddered, then continued. In Xian, we stopped at a place called the Feh School. Old Master Feh taught me the basics of unarmed combat. He opened the door to their room at the inn. After changing into a silken nightgown he had been given in Izumo, he gave Sheba a peck on the cheek and slipped into bed. Good night, Sheba. Sleep well. And with that, he fell asleep.

I hope Master Feh taught you enough, my angel. I am till worried that you may be killed. She slipped into the sleeping robe she'd gotten in Izumo, blew out the candles in their room, rolled into bed next to Ivan, embraced him, and fell asleep.

The next morning, Ivan rose early and began practicing. He was in the middle of some jumping exercises when a slash spell was fired at him. That, he dodged. He looked towards the bed. Sheba looked grumpily at him. *Do you have any idea how loud you're being? It's impossible for me to sleep!*

Sorry, he sent meekly. He quickly changed his clothes to the loose gray robes he'd gotten in Vault. They would work well, since they were not very constricting and were also tight enough to not impede him. *Well, I'm going to get something to eat.* As he left the room, a young man came up to him.

"I have a most marvelous breakfast for you, sir. Eggs, toast, bacon, sausage, jam, many drinks-" Ivan smiled at him.

"Just a couple slices of bacon, if you don't mind," he said. The young man nodded, ran to the kitchens, and returned with a huge platter, filled with all kinds of food. "Um, could you save that until later?" he asked. The young man nodded, unfazed.

"Ah yes, after you fight Akafubu, you will need much nourishment. I understand." With that, he let Ivan grab a few slices of bacon, a piece of toast, and a small glass of water, and let him go. By the time he passed the kitchen, Ivan had finished his breakfast.

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At noon, the two met in the center of town. Akafubu stuck the point of his spear on the ground, stripped to the waist,

and tossed the clothes aside. Ivan did the same with his clothes and staff, walking into the area designated for their fight. "Skill against skill," he said, bowing. He then assumed the position he hoped would grant him a defensive advantage.

Akafubu returned the bow. "May the best man win." And then it began.

Before Ivan had time to launch a strike, Akafubu lunged forward, right fist zooming towards Ivan's head. The Adept dodged that blow and another aimed at his stomach. Countering, he threw a kick at Akafubu.

The witch doctor moved like water, dodging the kick and knocking Ivan in the small of the back. As he went down, Ivan sent one of his legs sweeping at Akafubu, connecting with the man's ankles and forcing him down.

As he went down, Akafubu launched a punch at Ivan's mouth. This one connected, and in retaliation Ivan sent a foot toward Akafubu's chest, hoping that a trick Mia had used against him would come in handy.

It did, and his kick landed in his true target – Akafubu's stomach. Both got up, and then Akafubu started kicking. These were powerful kicks, and Ivan was sure that if any landed, he would be concussed or stunned. So he dodged, ducking and jumping to avoid the man's feet.

Finally, one connected. As Ivan ducked to dodge the right foot, the left came under it and walloped him. Ivan collapsed into the ground, but only for a moment – he pushed himself up quickly. Unfortunately, Akafubu sent another fist attack; this one hit in a flurry of blows, pummeling the Adept's chest, stomach, and face.

Ivan collapsed again. This time, however, he waited until Akafubu had walked over to see if he was out; this gave him time to recuperate. He grabbed the witch doctor's ankle and heaved. The ploy worked; Akafubu lay on the ground. Ivan sprang to his feet, his energy returning more quickly after the brief rest.

As the witch doctor returned to his feet, Ivan showed no mercy. He pushed forward relentlessly, kicking and punching as though his very life depended on beating his foe into the ground. One punch would launch the witch doctor into the sky, and the midair kick that followed it would send him crashing into the dirt, sliding a few feet. Another punch might snap his face to the left, and the following one would return the head to center. All the time, Akafubu was grinning, even as his blocks failed and he was beaten back even further.

Finally, Ivan let up. Akafubu swayed for a moment, then walked over to the spear, taking it out of the ground and using it instead as a walking stick. He was laughing. "I concede," he said, using Psynergy to heal both of them fully. "That was the best fight I have ever had. You deserve the sword." He clapped twice, and a young man bearing the thin blade came before them.

Before Ivan could think, he blurted out, "Are you an Adept?"

Akafubu shook his head, smiled, and replied, "No. But the witch doctor has certain powers." With that, he took the sword and pressed it into Ivan's hands. "Now then, why don't you have that breakfast you were saving?" At Ivan's astounded look, Akafubu laughed again. "What, you think I don't know the innkeeper?" His laugh became deeper and heartier the longer it lasted.